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THE
PHILOSOPHER'S
STONE

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✓
BY J. ANKER LARSEN

Translated from the Danish by Arthur G. Chater ✓
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... Wherever the blind girl appeared among men and women, old and young, their souls were illumined with the knowledge of Truth, Goodness and Beauty; wherever she came, in the artist's workshop, in the stately halls of the wealthy, or amid the hum of factory wheels, it was as though she brought a ray of sunshine, as though the string gave out its music, the flower its scent, and the refreshing dewdrop fell upon the languishing leaf.

But the Devil could have none of this; and, as he has the wit of more than ten thousand men, he knew what to do. He went to the swamp, took bubbles of its foul water, caused a sevenfold echo of the lying word to resound over it, to make it more powerful; he compounded a powder of mercenary laudatory poems and lying funeral orations, as many as he could find, boiled them in tears shed by envy, strewed upon them the rouge scraped from the withered cheeks of an old maid, and formed therewith a girl with the shape and gestures of the bountiful blind maid, "the gentle angel of devotion," as people called her; and so the Devil set things going. The world did not know which of the two was the right one, and how should the world know!

*"Be true to thyself and trust in God;
His will be done. Amen!"*

sang the blind girl in full reliance. She gave to the winds of heaven the four green leaves from the Tree of the Sun, to bring a message to her brothers; and she was sure that this would be fulfilled, nay more, that the jewel would be found which outshines all earthly glory: from the brow of humanity it would shine even to her Father's house.

"To my Father's house!" she repeated. "Yes, here on earth is the home of the jewel, and more than the assurance of this do I bring; I feel its glow, it swells and swells in my closed hand. Every little grain of Truth, however fine, which the keen wind carried with it, I caught and kept; I diffused through it the perfume of all the Beauty, of which there is so much in the world, even for the blind; I took the sound of human hearts beating in Goodness and laid it therein; grains of dust I bring, no more, and

yet the dust of the long-sought jewel in rich abundance; my whole hand is full of it!" and she held it out to—her Father. She was at home; with the speed of thought she had come there, since she had never let go the invisible thread that held her to her Father's house.

The Powers of Evil swept with the roar of a hurricane over the Tree of the Sun and forced their way through the open door into the secret chamber.

"It will blow away!" cried her Father, seizing the hand which she had opened.

"No!" said she in firm security. "It cannot blow away. I feel the warmth of its radiance within my soul."

And the Father saw a shining flame, as the gleaming dust fell from her hand upon the white page of the book which told of the certainty of eternal life; in dazzling splendour there was written but a single word, the one word FAITH. . . .

From *The Philosopher's Stone*—HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN.

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Book I

I. Churchyard and Playground

A ROAR hung over the playground, the shout of life from many young throats, while feet scurried hither and thither and arms waved in the air.

A man was hanging idly over the churchyard wall; the sun shone on his tanned face, but half his body lay in the shadow of the old elder-tree.

With a smile he turned from the deafening noise of the playground and stood with his back against the wall in a happy feeling of being outside it all, of not belonging anywhere, except where the sun happened to be shining.

The red tiled roof of the church glowed, its white walls shone, its tower looked bigger than usual, the whole church seemed to rear its head proudly in the sunshine.

But over on the other side, where a quarter of an hour ago he had stood watching a member of the parish council being lowered into the ground, things had a different look. There all was shadow, gloom and insecurity. The wall was fissured and leaned with the threat of a fall, which three heavy brick buttresses tried to prevent or at least to delay.

He still had in his ears the note of mortality from the tolling of the bell, and it suggested the idea that the buttresses might give way and the church collapse with a muffled sigh over the grave of the parish councillor.

But he was outside it all; it was no concern of his whether it stood or whether it gave way, whether they died or whether they played and shouted with a new-born life that knew no end.

He was anonymous, a man who was in the midst of it all and had done with it all, without being in the least tired of anything.

Life had washed him ashore in the parish of his birth, and there he had stayed, not like a wreck, but like a useful object that might be turned to anything, and was therefore used for nothing in particular. He had no profession, hardly a name—at any rate, it was known to few and used by none; everybody called him simply “the Professor,” though, as most of them were aware, he had

never been one. He was forty-two, but lithe and active as a lad of twenty, equally fitted for bodily or mental work, and happy in an equal freedom from the compulsion of either.

His eye measured the church tower, once the highest object in his world; since then he had seen things which soared more boldly, but a memory of warmth and cosiness hung about this old, sunny church tower. He had nothing to do inside the church door, preferred rather to stay outside, but an ineradicable sympathy lay in his heart and infused kindness into the smile with which he regarded the tottering edifice in the churchyard—once the expression of the spiritual life and celestial aspirations of the parish, now rather their monument.

The spiritual life of the parish had left the church, had followed the crooked paths of politics to Parliament, had found diversion in dissenting chapels, yawned a little over art, and bared its credulous head before science. Its celestial aspiration was buried with the dead in the churchyard. Religion had become a mole, and was only noticed when from time to time a new "cast" appeared among the old mounds in the churchyard. The church held possession of the dead bodies, the living had their hearts full of "Progress."

Of course they went to church, but for amusement, not for worship. The parson was a man of gifts, a speaker who could hold the attention. But when they went home it was with the same emotions as they would have carried away from a theatrical performance or an impressive lecture. Their imagination was stirred, but no religious *life* lived in them.

Had they grown out of their religion? Could the collapse of the church be delayed only, not prevented? Was the religious feeling about to become homeless, perhaps vanish altogether? Were the small beer of the Grundtvigians and the acrid lees of the Evangelicals signs that the cask was almost empty?

He turned again to the playground, where the coming parishioners tumbled about in the sport of the present, careless of past and future, Church and Parliament, school and university.

What would the old church come to mean to them, from the day it saw them confirmed till it received them into its earth?

If the religious feeling was in process of disappearing, what was to happen to the generation which could neither be said to possess it nor to be rid of it? What dawning destinies were striving to announce themselves in the hubbub before him?

His eye ranged over the playground and left it to chance which details might first emerge from the mass.

Sharp Martine, with her intelligent, alert, not too deep eyes, came towards the road arm in arm with pretty, gentle Tine, whose eyelids with their long, black lashes half veiled the dream she was revealing to the eager ears of Martine. Martine was awake to everything, quick to take in, arrange and place even the things she did not understand. She was fond of Tine—that was easy to see—just because she was so indescribably different from the rest without being the least bit odd. Tine excited Martine's imagination. The Professor had a peculiar faculty of looking at and seeing into people without exactly using thought, simply looking at and into them, till he felt their nature in himself. He might well have set up as a fortune-teller and predicted things about the futures of the two girls which would probably have come true.

A private carriage came driving past. Its silver-mounted harness jingled, its wheels on their rubber tires rolled softly as on air; in it sat ladies and gentlemen, neat and smart, talking and smiling to each other with nothing else to do. It was like a holiday driving past.

Tine stopped still, her arm slipped from Martine's, her eyes with their long, black lashes opened wider and wider and followed the carriage as though bound to it by longing. To Martine a carriage was a carriage; she watched Tine with curiosity, while her thoughts played in her eyes like fish rising in the water.

There was a sound of scraping on the churchyard wall. It was Holger, the widow's son, leaning his back against it.

The Professor forgot the two girls and began to watch him, thinking:

"A queer fellow that; he always catches one's attention and holds it fast, goodness knows why. There is something incommensurable about him, something as safe as a house and something profoundly disquieting; he is both too big and too little, too precocious and too childishly naïve. What does he want with that mighty forehead, when blessed stupidity dwells massively in his cheeks, like a cow in a meadow chewing the cud? How reconcile that sensitive mouth with the barbaric force of the chin and the narrow fanatical lips? His eyes are clear and yet like bog-water when you look into them, you don't expect any bottom, the very ground-water is in them, as though there were no division between the subconscious and the conscious. What sun can that be that is

now lighting them up and turning them blue?" The boy's head hung aslant in an incredible degree of rustic placidity. His mouth was as soft as a child's that has not yet got its teeth, but it also showed the grown-up tenderness of a mother's and the deep worship of a youth's. A smile of devotion lighted up his whole face, the smile that may be seen on peasants' faces when they discover that the land which is rich and fertile and well cultivated is at the same time beautiful, and with heartfelt emotion they give vent to their feeling for the *kalon kai agathon* in the hushed exclamation: "It's pretty!" The word "pretty" then sums up for them all the goodness and joy of life.

The Professor's eyes followed Holger's and came upon the joiner's little daughter Hansine with her dimples, forget-me-not eyes and plait of fair hair, the joiner's little Hansine who always looked as if to-day were Sunday. She was standing in a group of girls, and her dimples were full of sunshine, overflowing with sunshine, which threw the Sunday gleam on the faces of the others. The Professor thought: "So long as there are children on earth like little Hansine, people will believe there are angels in heaven." But how is it that that hulking boy over by the wall is the only one of them who feels it to the full and *knows* he is looking at a revelation?"

He turned again towards Holger to look at him and try to see into him, but at that moment the boy's great frame gave a start.

What caused it was a scream from the middle of the playground, where little Hans Olsen had been playing, with a round and friendly posterior turned to the churchyard. He had the most innocent-looking calves in the world, a pair of little stumps; his white hair amused itself by curling about his temples.

He had just finished a great game: he was the owner of a field, which he ploughed, sowed and reaped. He "bought" another and then another; at last he had a whole farm and farmed it diligently. He got up on his pins and looked at what he had done and saw that it was good. He was happy; he heard the shouts of the others and knew that they were happy too. As he stood wrapt in his own and the others' happiness, he was too tempting an object for one of the big boys of the top class, who gave the friendly posterior a kick, so that the whole farmer flew across his well-tilled land and came to earth far from the things which were good, with his nose against a stone.

Huge as an elephant for whom all made way, the widow's son

Holger crossed the playground, lifted the little man up, carried him to the pond and bathed his face, took his handkerchief, wiped away the blood and sand, and carried him to the churchyard wall, so that he might sit up against it and sun himself well.

But as he was handing him the handkerchief he saw that it was covered with blood. He stood still, staring into it.

The Professor watched him attentively. He had a feeling that Holger was just now passing from one world into another. His face had expressed the tenderness and concern of a father or a big brother; now this slowly gave place to a look of blank wonder. One of the big boys had struck one of the little ones. Holger's whole being expressed nothing at all but a colossal questioning stupidity. He didn't understand anything, but a feeling was working its way up through him from somewhere deep down. His eyes got heavy and turbid, anything might be expected; his narrow lips compressed into a thin line, the turbid look vanished from his eyes, but with it all sign of humanity: they were like the eyes of a wild beast.

The handkerchief fell to the ground beside Hans Olsen. Holger turned and walked slowly with bent head and searching glance into the crowd. He had not seen who gave the kick, but he was not left long in doubt, for a space was cleared around the culprit; the other boys, knowing what Holger was like when his eyes stiffened, made way.

The one who had done it stood stiff with fright; he knew he might be killed or maimed, Holger knew no bounds when the berserk rage came over him, and the worst thing one could do was to resist.

Holger looked him in the eyes for an evil second, then planted his clenched fist in his face. The boy dropped without a sound. Holger threw himself upon him, lifted him up, and flung him to the ground. The others thought they could hear his teeth clattering as his neck struck the earth. The boy lay like a corpse. But nobody dared to interfere. The Professor vaulted over the churchyard wall, Holger had already lifted the boy again, when he heard a "No" and felt a warm breath upon his face.

It was little Hansine, who had run up and stood looking at him. "No more," she said; "you mustn't give him any more."

Holger stared into the blue forget-me-not eyes, while he carefully deposited the boy on the ground.

Then he remained on his knees looking into her eyes.

The Professor walked off slowly in the direction of the school.

Holger was still on his knees looking at Hansine. He did nothing but look. He had not got so far as thinking, there was no room for more than sight.

"Help him," she said, and went away.

Then Holger recovered his reason.

He lifted the boy, carried him carefully up to the churchyard wall, and put him by the side of Hans Olsen.

After that he walked quickly across the playground into the school.

When the Professor looked through the window he saw Holger lying with his head on the table crying. His weeping was passing into the unconscious stage, his broad shoulders shook rhythmically, like the beats of a pulse.

The Professor went home without another look at the playground, but Annine Clausen, who came trotting past chatting to herself, stopped and asked what was the matter, and one of the boys answered:

"It's Holger Enke * again; he's thrashed one of the big boys for striking one of the little ones."

"Hum, hum," said Annine, "he can't bear anybody being bullied, it makes him wild with sheer kindness. What a funny thing life is, to be sure."

She trotted on, pondering this, and felt she would like a cup of coffee with Kirsten Per Smeds.†

But as she passed the hedge which separated the parish clerk's garden from the road, she was stopped by a pair of eyes that looked far beyond her. She said "Good day," got no answer, and trotted on, again chattering to herself.

"There he is again right inside the hedge, the clerk's little son, looking down the road as if he was expecting something a long way off—whatever can a boy like that be looking for?—That's just what I said to his mother, when he lay in his cradle and opened his eyes and looked right past us all as if he wanted to find something we couldn't see: 'Whatever can the boy be looking for?' said I. Oh, well, how time flies! He'll soon be going to school like my own Niels Peter that I was ashamed of having, because I wasn't married, and now I'm glad I've got him. Oh, well, I went to school there myself with little Jens's grandfather, who's

* I.e., "Holger the widow's son."—Tr.

† I.e., "Kirsten the wife of Peter the smith."—Tr.

now lying in the churchyard. What a funny thing life is, to be sure. I wonder whether Kirsten's got coffee ready?"

Kirsten had, and Annine ran on while she was drinking it.

"I'd like to know what the clerk's little boy is always looking for in the hedge there.—'You don't see any further than the end of your nose,' his grandfather used always to say to us in school, but we saw further than him for all that, for now he's lying in the churchyard, and now there's his little grandson there looking past us grown-ups—bless me, what a funny thing life is, to be sure, and how crisp you've made this soda cake. Fancy now, the widow's Holger's been and half killed another boy out of sheer kindness! He doesn't know when to stop when his heart runs away with him."

"He takes after his dead father," said Kirsten, who had so much to say about the widow's late husband that Annine had to run home at a jog-trot to pass it on.

The parish clerk's little Jens was still standing in the hedge and she had just time to call out to him:

"What is it you're waiting for?"

She was gone before the little fellow woke up and could answer her.

But the question stuck, and while he blankly followed Annine with his eyes, it burrowed deep below his thoughts, till it reached the place where he kept the things he had forgotten. As Annine disappeared round a corner the question bobbed up from the depths like a waterfowl, with the answer in its beak, and held it out to him in the sunshine.

Yes, of course, that was it, and what a long time it was ago. He had stood here every day looking out, until he had forgotten what he was looking for and only came here because there was something he longed for, and stood here because it was a lovely place to stand.

But then she might easily have gone past, many times perhaps, and he simply had not known it was she.

Well, it must be one of those he knew, and now that he remembered who it was he longed to see, he would try his best to know her again.

But how long ago was it? Two years or three years? He was much smaller then; for now he was allowed to walk by himself in the long, dark woodland paths of "Fredeskov," where his mother led him by the hand that day. He could plainly see the

place where it happened. His mother stopped to talk to a lady; by the side of the lady stood a little girl who looked like a picture; she was alive, of course, but just as pretty as a picture. She had a pink frock on. And a bag of sweets in her hand. He stood looking into her eyes, and they were the sort of eyes that you could go on looking into without getting tired of it, even if Mother and the lady talked for a long time. The little girl gave him her sweets. He took them and didn't say thanks, though he meant to; but he didn't get so far, because he was still busy looking at her, and suddenly his mother and the lady said good-bye to one another.

They were good sweets, even better than sweets generally are, the sort of sweets there must be in fairy-tales. He would like to see her again and say thanks and ask where those sweets came from.

And so it had occurred to him that she must surely pass the school one day, and then he would be standing in the hedge and would ask her and say thanks, and perhaps she would play with him.

But she had never come, at any rate not before he had forgotten that it was she he was looking for. But now he remembered, and now he would know her right enough. Suddenly he struck his fist very decidedly against a branch of the hazel: "Why, I know her already! It's one of those I know, I'm sure I've seen her since without knowing it. But which of the ones I have seen is it?"

It might be the joiner's little daughter Hansine. He would have liked it to be Hansine; all the same he didn't really believe it was she.

But if she came past one day while he stood there, he was sure he would know her, even if she hadn't a pink frock and had grown bigger.

He bent some slender branches of hazel together to make a chair. It was a good chair; he sat in it and was lost in thought, gazing far down the road.

He was still sitting there when the children poured out of school, where nothing of importance had happened that afternoon except that little Hans Olsen and still smaller Ellen Nielsen looked up at each other from their copy-books at the same moment, broke into a smile, and knew then that they were good friends, even though they might never go so far as to say it to each other, since he was a boy and she was a girl.

II. In the Hay

PASTOR BARNES stood before his glass shaving. His eight-year-old son, Christian, sat in a corner watching him and had pangs of conscience because it struck him that his father was ugly. It was not right of him, for everybody said Pastor Barnes was a handsome man. The boy screwed up his eyes and had a good look.

The pastor felt that he was being observed; he turned and said in an irritated voice: "What are you looking at?" Christian got up and stole out.

There it was again. His father didn't like people to look at him without his knowing it. But Christian was possessed by a painful craving to steal upon him; he lay in wait for him, spied him out, was remorseful about it but could not leave it off. He had a nasty feeling that his father was not fully dressed when he was alone.

Pastor Barnes stood doubtful a moment, looked at himself in the glass, and saw a face comic with shaving-soap and irresolution. He washed the soap off, looked at himself again, and gave a start, refusing to recognize the face as his own. It was not like him, it was insignificant.

He pulled himself up, like a gymnast looking for his practice apparatus. A train of memories passed through his mind: he reviewed them with dissatisfaction, but dwelt with relief on yesterday's funeral. A bright, firm look came into his face. If his son had looked in at the window he would have seen a scrupulously dressed and remarkable man.

For remarkable Pastor Barnes was—on occasion; seldom privately. But in the presence of a crowd a situation might take hold of him and carry him along with it. He was good at confirmations, excellent at weddings, but incomparable at funerals. He was the best grave-side orator in the diocese, and old Niels Madsen on his death-bed expressed a thought which was dormant in many besides himself, when, in reply to the clergyman's question whether he had now thrown all thoughts of

this world overboard, he said: "All except one, Pastor Barnes, that I might hear the words you are going to say over my coffin."

The pastor's own son was the only one who did not share the general admiration, and yet he had been lucky in the first funeral he attended. For that was when they lowered his aunt into the ground. She had lived at the parsonage from his earliest years, and throughout his childhood her appearance indoors or out had been like a cloud before the sun on a spring day. At last Providence thought it had gone on long enough and brought her days to an end. Christian was big enough to go to the funeral, his father said. It was a proud feeling: besides being big he was alive. For once he could triumph over his aunt. She was well looked after; the coffin-lid was screwed down, he had seen it done himself. She couldn't get up and snap out: "He's too young to be there."

He was interested in hearing what his father would say over her grave. But he soon lost the thread of it in astonishment at his father's voice, which was different, rather bigger and broader than usual, something like himself when he had a new suit of clothes on. When he had finished being astonished he got sleepy, but was saved from dropping off by catching sight of a woman who must have been ill, as she was crying. But there was another, and yet another, and several men too. He amused himself by counting how many were crying, and wondering what was the reason. It was no use telling him they were sorry they would never see Aunt again. Suddenly it dawned on him that it was his father who made them cry, and then he gave him his undivided attention. It ended in a deep sigh of relief; there was no doubt about it, he had found the right solution. His father was not crying himself, for of course he knew Aunt pretty well, but he stood there and amused himself by making people cry, just like the maids in the kitchen, who delighted in frightening him with ghost stories they didn't believe in themselves.

The next funeral oration he heard was yesterday's, which his father was now looking back on with pleasure. He had made up his mind to listen very carefully, but forgot to, because it seemed to him that his father suddenly grew bigger as he came up to the coffin. It looked as if he stepped up on to the corpse so as to be seen better. When once the boy had got that idea into his head he could not get rid of it again. His father was treading

on the corpse he was talking about. Now and then he came to a full stop and looked as he did at his writing-table when he couldn't get the sermon to go properly. Every time that happened he dropped his eyes to the coffin a moment, then threw his head back and raised his voice, and a few more started to cry. Christian didn't bother to count them, he was more interested in seeing how many times his father had to turn his eyes to the coffin, like a boy looking down into his book.

While thus engaged he was disturbed by his imagination. It struck him suddenly that his father was like a big black bird that pecked at something, stretched its neck, and swallowed it. The thing the bird was pecking at was a corpse, and as bad luck would have it, Christian had just been reading about big birds that lived on carrion. He felt sick and thought he could smell the corpse through the coffin. Never did an Amen sound so comforting as that which proceeded from the mouth of Pastor Barnes just as his son raised a handkerchief to his own to retch into.

The boy now went through the garden with hanging head, afraid of having broken the commandment, "Thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother." He jumped over the fence into the field, where the hay was in cocks, crawled up one of them, lay on his back, and sniffed in the scent.

Heaven was high up and very blue. He looked up at it. Could Aunt really be there? It would interest him to know whether she had gone to hell. The thought made him grin, but he checked himself. "I hope I am not wicked," he said, horrified.

He looked inquiringly at the blue for a long time, until he could feel that he was good.

It was nice to know that, so he kept on gazing up to heaven. When he had lain for a while the haycock began to move. It didn't swing to and fro; it was the earth itself that was carrying it round. Because of course the earth hangs in space and moves. The geography book says so. Now he could see it was true. He found that out by gazing up to heaven. All good gifts and all wisdom come from there. The Bible says so.

The longer he gazed up into the blue, the bluer it got; at last he thought his eyes too were blue. Just then they felt tired, he shut them and saw that he was blue inside. The blue inside him was the same as the blue in heaven, and now he would try to

make himself one with it, so that he would be blue and good right through—and then he began to soar; the haycock soared with him, it too had turned blue, the colour was catching.

Higher and higher, faster and faster he went up on his haycock—and what he had been told was quite true, that heaven was open infinitely—you could soar right in—and it was blue and blessed on every side—so that was what it meant to be blessed—but where were the others?—and how was it?—for the blessed are dead—but he was blessed, and he couldn't be dead!

Terror seized him, he turned giddy and fell deep, deep down, was afraid of hurting himself—but if he could fall he was anyhow not dead—and perhaps the haycock would break his fall—now for it—and he lay on the ground at the foot of the haycock, sore behind but blessed at heart.

While he was still rubbing himself he suddenly saw before him the page in the Bible story which tells about Stephen. "I see the heavens opened."

"Yes," he said. "That was what I saw. I saw heaven open. I was not asleep, because I was thinking all the time about what was happening. And sleeping won't make you as I am still, so blue, I mean, so happy and good. I'm sure I can never be wicked again."

This was a thing a good boy ought to tell his mother, for she would be glad to hear it. Christian Barnes went home and said to his mother that he had seen into heaven.

"Don't talk such nonsense," said she. It was close on dinner-time and the joint might get burnt.

"Well, but Stephen," he began, "he did too——"

"Don't let your father hear any of that," she said. "Go in now and wash your hands, it's dinner-time."

Was not the thing he had experienced far more important than a joint of beef? And she would not so much as ask what he meant when he said he had seen into heaven.

But he was so good that he could not be angry; he honoured his father and his mother, obeyed and washed his hands, sat down to the table and looked out through the window, up to the blue heavens, promised to honour his father and his mother all his life, and got a nudge from his mother and a severe look from his father, who started over again with: "For what we are about to receive." His tone was harsh and gloomy, because his son had not clasped his hands; it recalled the funeral oration of the

day before. Christian bent over his plate, looking at the helping of beef his mother had given him, and it occurred to him that the ox was dead. It was a corpse he had to eat. That was impossible. He asked to be excused.—Why?—Well, why?—After that about the heavens' being opened, he would be careful not to speak the truth. "It is so fat," he said.

"Rubbish," admonished Pastor Barnes. "No daintiness! If you don't like the fat, eat it quickly. Look at me, I don't like fat either."

Pastor Barnes bent down over his plate, took a piece of fat, put it in his mouth, threw his head back, as he had done in the funeral oration, and swallowed it.

Then Christian in turn bent over his plate and was sick over the beef.

It cost him a thrashing, and he ran out into the garden and cried.

Soon after Pastor Barnes came out, feeling sorry he had thrashed the boy if he was really ill.

"Are you ill?" he asked. "Is it your stomach, or what is it?"

Meanwhile, feeling foolish at having forgotten himself immediately after saying grace, and uncertain whether the boy was really ill or only shamming, he had a look of empty professional sympathy, and his voice was thick, as though the fat still stuck in his throat.

Christian looked up at his father and was sick once more.

Then he was put to bed. "He's feverish," said his mother. "I could tell that by the way he was talking before he came in to dinner."

They took his temperature, but it was quite normal, and they looked at each other with a puzzled expression on their wise, grown-up faces.

III. Lillebror

KRISTEN the sexton was working in the parish clerk's garden. The clerk's little boy sat in the hedge playing with the lid of Kristen's new pipe.

He was playing with the whole universe and God too, turning the lid towards the shade, so that the green hazel-bushes and the paths and lawns of the garden were reflected in it—that was the earth; he turned the lid upward, so that it sparkled with blue—that was heaven; he turned it straight against the sun, and it was all light and heat—that was God coming into heaven. In heaven you were always near God, but when he came there you could see him and nothing else. That was why God sometimes went out of heaven and into his own place, so that you could see the blue glory of heaven and be mirrored in it. God never came on the shady earth, but it was pretty all the same, because God was shining behind heaven. Jens learned a lot from that pipe-lid. The only thing he missed was hell. But then the black, stinking under-side of the lid, where you saw no sign of God, would do for that.

"Kristen," he said, "you've got heaven and earth and God and hell in your pipe-lid."

"Bless my soul!" said Kristen. "Then they've sold it to me far too cheap—here's your father coming."

The clerk looked uneasily at his son, blinked his eyes nervously, as if he didn't know what to do with them, and said at last:

"Go over to the parsonage and ask if you may play with Christian till we send for you."

"Yes, it's near now, isn't it?" asked the sexton.

The clerk looked at Kristen as though he would seek help wherever he could find it. Jens had never seen his father so much at a loss; he looked as if his trousers had suddenly grown far too big for him.

"Go now, little Jens," he said.

Jens trotted off; it was clear that they wanted him out of the

way. But he could see it was no use asking why. That made him ponder over it all the more.

But when he got to the parsonage, he forgot it over a globe which the pastor showed him, telling him it was the earth. It was round, and yet the people who lived on the under-side didn't fall off, nor did they walk with their feet in the air.

That was science, said the pastor.

Jens understood the pipe-lid better.

"Do you believe it's true," he asked Christian, when they were alone in the yard, "that about science?"

"Grown-ups always tell lies," declared Christian.

"Even when they are teaching us something?"

"There's always some lie in what they tell us, they think we shouldn't understand without."

"Don't you believe in grown-ups at all?"

Christian shook his head.

Jens felt cold inside, he had a feeling that they were on the black under-side of the pipe-lid.

"Don't you believe in God either?" he asked.

"Yes, of course I do," said Christian. He fixed his sharp eyes on Jens and said hesitatingly:

"Do you believe we can see into heaven?"

Jens could tell that a good deal depended on the answer, so he said:

"I believe we might be able to."

Christian held out his hand to him.

"I have," he said.

Jens gave him his.

"Then we can," he said.

That made them friends.

When the girl came to fetch Jens, he remembered that there was some secret in the wind and made for home at a run. He came upon his father in the doorway and stopped, staring at him in amazement. He was quite changed. No question now of his trousers being too big for him. It was clear there was nothing to be afraid of with such a father. He was like the picture in the illustrated Bible, where it said underneath: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

The clerk threw out his hand and raised his voice:

"You've got a little brother!"

It was evidently a present, and Jens hurried in to see it.

But he couldn't get in, for his father stood in the way and his father was so big and broad.

"Aren't you glad?" he asked.

Jens was disappointed, that was what he was. He could see that his mother was ill, and that there was an ugly red face lying beside her and squalling. That was nothing to be glad about. But his father stood there looking important, just as he did when he told him about the invention of the art of printing: "Can you see now what a good thing it is that we have invented the art of printing?"—and it turned out to be somebody else who had invented it. And now he had got a little brother! No, it was his parents who had got him, that was clear enough.

But for the next few days both girls and men greeted him with: "Well, so you've got a little brother! Are you glad?"

Christian is right, thought Jens; grown-ups always tell lies, even when what they say is true.

But Dorte the basket-woman hit the right nail on the head when she gave him a doughnut and said: "So now your parents have got another besides you."

From that day forth he believed every word that proceeded out of the mouth of Dorte the basket-woman.

IV. A Shooting Star

“**N**OW you have got a little brother, so you had better begin going to school,” said the clerk, and so Jens went to school.

He sat there day after day all through a summer when the weather was always so fine that it lived in his memory as the one real summer above all others.

He loved the writing-lessons when big and small pupils were all together. He didn't get much done in them, but sat watching the others from his place on the bottom form.

There was the pastor's son Christian, who spelt his name with a C, sat first among the small boys, and, according to the clerk, was able to think for himself. There was Annine Clausen's Niels Peter, who either knew nothing at all or had the whole lesson by heart; there was Holger Enke, who was so fearfully strong and who declared that he always knew his lesson “inside himself,” but could never get it out, or at any rate only in bits which were all jumbled up together. And then there was Kristian Mogensen with a K, who always had flies crawling on his back, no doubt because he was such a nice boy that even the flies had found it out. He had gentle eyes, and his hushed voice always made Jens think he was going to tell him something good. Those were the boys that interested him most. Oh, and then his neighbour on the form, little Hans Olsen, who got teased about being sweethearts with Ellen Nielsen, which made Han's cheeks go red, but certainly gave him a happy feeling inside.

On the girls' side the two top places belonged to Tine, who was so pretty and so tidy, everybody said, and the joiner's daughter Hansine, who to Jens's mind was like the patch of sunlight on the floor by the window. Her eyes looked like two forget-me-nots with the sun on them, and on each cheek she had a dimple which had the power of making Jens happy if they appeared when she said anything to him. . . .

Just as the dimples slowly disappeared from Hansine's face when she became serious, so did the sun vanish imperceptibly

until Jens had to wear mittens and greatcoat. One cold, dark winter afternoon the school was given a half-holiday because a well-known missionary had come to hold a meeting in the mission room. The mothers wanted their children to be there, for, as they said, "then they will be able to say they have heard him when they are grown up."

The clerk reluctantly gave his consent; as far as Jens could understand, his father did not particularly wish to recognize the famous missionary. "He has never been to college," he said, looking as if he reproached the preacher with having had no part in the invention of the art of printing, and to Pastor Barnes he repeated with a smile like that of the head boy in the top class when he was heard his lesson: "Of course what he says may be very well, but the trouble is, one can tell he has never been to college." Pastor Barnes smiled, the same kind of smile as the teacher's when the head boy had answered correctly. He said nothing, but seemed to have a good opinion of the clerk.

The missionary's famous name filled the hall; people from the parish and people from the market town sat squeezed together into a single compact mass, which gradually became a passive instrument for the missionary's thoughts.

He was a tall man of ponderous build, a giant in body, but even more powerful in the spirit. He had a lively imagination, and when warmed through with his intense feeling it produced pictures of heaven and hell which gave his hearers a sense of personal experience. Their faces shone with desire of the glory of the New Jerusalem; he worked them up into an ecstasy which, so long as the intoxication lasted, might have made them martyrs for the joy of their faith. But when he suddenly cried in a loud voice: "Yet—there is also another place," and filled the air with thunder and lightning, with sulphurous flames and the torments of the damned, their faces reflected all the sufferings of the lost together with a sweating deadly fear.

Only the clerk and the pastor and the Professor seemed to be free from the general self-surrender. The pastor and the clerk looked displeased, and little Jens Dahl remembered that of course the missionary had not been to college. But the Professor had, and he passed his eye attentively from one to another, till it rested on a little girl whose terrified soul was forced into her eyes. Jens knew her well; it was little Helen Strömstad from the town, the little girl that people never mentioned without saying that she was

so sweet and well brought up, whereupon they invariably added: "Yes, I must admit that about her mother—she has brought up her child as she ought—but otherwise I *must* say——" What it was they must say was never heard when children were present.

Little Helen was terrified at all the things that might happen to a person after death and anxious because the grown-ups were crying. She clung to her mother, a buxom beauty, who tried to smile at the little one and threw a shy glance at a lottery collector from the town who sat a little way off. He was sweating under the thin hair of his crown and plucked nervously at his drooping moustache, looking as if he wanted to say: "What made us come here? Haven't we troubles enough already?"

Little Helen grew paler and paler, and Jens determined to steal up to her and whisper: "You mustn't mind what he says, he hasn't been to college," but he sat tight between the hips of the bailiff's wife and Kirsten Per Smeds, and they were fat; he couldn't get out. Then he fell into a doze and only woke up when they were all outside and the fresh air and the stillness, which was made denser by the soft falling of the big white snowflakes, had such an overwhelming effect after the excitement of the close mission room that nobody had the power to say a word or make up his mind to go.

Suddenly little Helen's thin, clear voice cut through the silence: "Mother, what is snow?"

The missionary came up with an explanation, but the Professor, who was standing by the side of the little girl, cut him short by bending down to her and saying:

"It's the cotton-wool falling out of God's ears, my little friend."

She looked at him in surprise and asked:

"Why does he have all that cotton-wool in his ears?"

"So that he may not hear how hideously men misuse his name," said the Professor.

The effect of this explanation was instantaneous on all those who had completely lost their self-control during the description of the torments of hell. Both women and men laughed as loudly as they had sobbed in the hall.

The missionary, who thought he saw all his work spoilt and who was still full of his ecstatic exaltation, stepped up to the Professor and shouted:

"Take care that God does not hear your blasphemy. For God is a mighty God and a jealous God. God can paralyse the strength

of your arm! God can smite you to the ground before my feet this very moment! God can send your soul to everlasting, eternal, never-ending torment! God can make your life one perpetual, never-ceasing cry of pain!"

He recovered his power over the listening crowd, but the Professor said quietly to the little girl, as he pointed up into the air:

"Do you see, now it has left off snowing. So now you know that God has a use for his cotton-wool."

The missionary saw the smile that gathered on the lips of the men. A torrent of fire raced through him, and as his tongue was paralysed with rage the violence went into his limbs; he raised his arm and his huge clenched fist was launched at the Professor's face.

What happened then was so rapid that no one managed to follow it all. Some just caught sight of the Professor's left hand as it flew into the air and seized the missionary's right arm; others saw him dart forward "like a flash of lightning" and grasp his left. Everyone had time to see him stand with both hands firmly clutching his opponent's wrists and give his arms a short, sharp twist which brought a spasm of pain into the broad face.

The Professor looked into the missionary's eyes with a smile and said, while at every "blessed" he gave his arms a dexterous little twist:

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

He closed one eye and braced his muscles as he concluded:

"Blessed are ye when men shall persecute you."

A final hard twist sent the missionary to ground with an unholy roar of pain, and the Professor put his hands in his pockets and walked home.

A couple of men picked up the fallen giant and took him into the parsonage. The crowd stood irresolute for a moment, unable to make up their minds either about what they had seen or what they had heard; but all at once one of them remarked that he was hungry. They all gave a sigh of relief and exclaimed that they felt just the same, whereupon they separated and went home.

Holger Enke was standing beside Annine's Niels Peter and Jens Dahl. He stared after the Professor with wide-open eyes.

"He had him down," he said quietly; "he had him down and let him lie in peace. He didn't lose his temper a second."

"No, he was grinning all the time," said Niels Peter. "But he knew the Sermon on the Mount all right."

"Be quiet," said Holger, looking up to the sky, where a shooting star left a white streak after it.

The big fellow clasped his hands and followed the star with moisture in his eyes.

"What's up?" said Niels Peter, as Holger put his hands in his pockets again. "Were you praying?"

"They say," said Holger, "that if we wish while a star is falling, it will come true."

"Then what did you wish?"

If Holger had not been so fearfully strong, Niels Peter would have gone into fits of laughter, for Holger Enke had the look of a very small boy as he said quietly and sincerely:

"I prayed that some day I might be like the Professor."

In the parsonage the missionary was having his wrists massaged. The pastor's wife was rubbing them, and Christian sat looking on.

The pastor walked up and down the room and asked again and again whether it was still painful.

Every time his back was turned to the missionary, he pursed up his mouth and shut his eyes.

Christian was certain that his father had a smile inside him which was not allowed to slip out. There was no doubt the pastor was inwardly tickled about what had befallen the missionary.

V. The Language of Heaven

AFTER all it was Jens who had got a brother. It happened one day when he thought the little one was dead. The day before, he had seen Jakob Hansen's puppy lying on its side with its paws stretched out and not breathing. "It's dead," said the foreman. "I'd better tell Jakob; he was very fond of it."

The next day Jens came into the bedroom and saw Lillebror* lying on his side, very pale, with his arms stretched out over the bed-clothes and not breathing. "He's dead," thought Jens. "I'd better tell Mother." If he was sorry about it, he forgot that in the knowledge that he was the first to find it out.

All at once, he couldn't say why, he had a feeling that the little one was alive after all. The head that was just now dead, looked as if it was asleep, and a little while after he could hear the breathing; colour came into the cheeks too. "I expect he was almost dead," thought Jens, "but now he's alive."

He shuddered. He had felt, more deeply than he himself could guess, how life and death, like twins, sleep cuddled up in the same cradle, and that launched his thoughts into the deep.

"I wonder where we come from. Where are we, before we are here?" He stared at the little one, who woke under his gaze and opened his eyes. They did not see Jens, they saw nothing that was in the room; they were bottomless, but deep down in them lay Lillebror himself, looking back for something from which he had just returned, and Jens looked down through Lillebror's eyes to see what it was.

As he was gazing, he had a feeling that his eyes *touched* the little one's, and at the same time he noticed a change in his own, a change that did him good. Something from Lillebror's eyes had come into his and made them expand in a lovely way. It made them happy. His mouth was also made happy, for it smiled, and inside his breast was the happiest of all, *certainly*, which now came up into his head: he had had a glimpse of what Lillebror was

* I.e., "Little Brother."—Tr.

looking back for, what he had just come from. And that was heaven.

That was how it was. Heaven is where we come from; that is where we were before we came here. Lillebror still remembered it, was almost there when he was asleep. If only he could speak and say what he remembered!

Then Lillebror smiled, and Jens knew that he understood, even if he could not speak. For there was the same gleam in their eyes, the same smile on their lips, and the same joy within them both. There was not the slightest difference. *They remembered together.*

And that is why we have to learn to speak when we have been born, for in heaven we do not speak as we do here. We are so happy that we cannot say a word. Nor do we have to, for we look at each other and know it all at once. That is how the language of heaven is. Everything at once, and happiness all through. There is nothing in it but that. We know it of ourselves.

Nor can we forget it. But we can forget that we know it. How can that be?

He looked about the room and saw how wonderful it was. He recognized this wonder in it. It had been like that once.

But one day came and then another—all the days came walking into the room and took their places and set their mark on it. The last to come was to-day, and then the room was finished; there was a chair, and there was a table, and his name was Jens, and the art of printing had been invented.

That is how we come to forget, he thought; the days come in and change everything.

He forgot Lillebror, because he had to think. He went out to the hazel hedge and sat in his "chair" and wondered about all the days that came and changed everything we see.

But perhaps in heaven it is always the same?

He struck his fist against the chair and jumped up.

"It *is*," he said. "The Bible says so! To the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. It's in my catechism. That's how it is—everything at once."

The joy of the language of heaven filled his little earthly ego, and he went in to the only one he knew who could speak it to him.

This only one had forgotten it completely. Lillebror was

crying with unhappiness over his new world. The clerk and his wife talked and talked and tried to console him and rocked the cradle. The louder they talked and the more they rocked, the more violently the little one cried.

Of course. For he didn't understand a word.

Jens went up to the cradle.

"Let me," he said.

They let go the cradle and stared at him in astonishment. He had spoken as a grown-up person speaks to children.

He stopped the cradle and touched the little one's hand. He was quite sure of himself, for he had the language of heaven within him.

Lillebror looked up at him, clasped his hand about his finger, and smiled.

They both smiled and conversed in the wordless language of heaven.

Lillebror gave vent to his joy in a first attempt at human language—a long series of rolling rrr's.

"What in the world's this?" said the clerk. "Your mother couldn't get him to be quiet. And *I*——"

There was such immense weight in his "*I*" that he was quite unable to find a suitable continuation, nor did he care to make a downright admission of failure.

Jens answered dryly:

"You see, you were talking to him in a language he hasn't learnt yet. And that's stupid."

Now this was nothing but an echo of what the clerk had said the day before about talking Danish to a foreigner; but if one's calling gives one occasion, with a rising sense of superiority, to say "stupid" to others, it may easily become a grave crime when the word is applied to oneself.

The clerk took his son by the hand and let the rod teach him to honour his father and his mother.

Soon after, he was standing as stiff as a post in the hazel hedge. The calm exultation had been driven out of his heart, and the place where the exorcism had been carried out was too sore to permit him to sit down.

VI. Pastor Barnes

DR. LOHSE was saying good-bye to Pastor Barnes. "The crisis will arrive in the course of the night," he said; "if she gets over it, all will be well. If not—then——"

The pastor looked at the doctor with a prayer in his eyes.

"If not, then—the worst will happen," said the doctor, and turned away.

Pastor Barnes went in. The worst! Yes, it was the worst that could happen to him, if his wife died. He couldn't believe it either. Perhaps he himself might deserve a trial, but his calling would not be able to support this, and his calling was the service of the Lord, and for its sake the Lord had need of his wife. He glanced at the comfortable thought that she would be saved because he was a clergyman. But to-night the crisis would come, and he would watch. Watch and pray. Watch and pray, as the Scriptures say. An eloquent prayer was born in his mind, but was crushed before it took shape by the fearful admission that it was a prayer meant to be said aloud and heard by others. Nobody else would be there; Pastor Barnes felt that he could say the prayers of the congregation, but not his own. He bowed his head in contrition and groaned: "Lord, help me, help me!"

This gave him a moment's peace, and he went into the sick-room. His wife was unconscious, his anxiety returned, he went back to his study and walked restlessly about the room in all directions, touched the things on his writing-table, arranged them, but left a picture hanging crookedly, because it hung so the last time she was in the room, and if she should never come there again——

Never again! It was like tearing his soul to pieces, like stripping it lengthwise, he would never again be a whole being. No, for even if they had not thought about it or noticed it much for many years, it was nevertheless true, as he had told her—quoting Plato—when they were engaged, that they were twin souls, which together made a whole human being.

"Twin souls have a common task in life. But when death snatches away one of them, the other is sick to death. Is there, then, no remedy? Yes, there is; we know, we know that the other is with the angels, helping the bereaved one with her intercessions and—we may venture to believe—leading his erring steps here below. Nothing is greater than to have one's twin soul in heaven, nearer to God—and thereby we ourselves are nearer to him. We must bless and praise——"

He stopped, appalled, in the middle of the room. He had been pronouncing a funeral oration over his wife.

Was he an egotistical, self-occupied person, incapable of feeling real sorrow, but only fear, selfish fear, of losing something that belonged to him? Was it God's purpose to strike his selfishness in pieces, and must his wife die to tear him out of his self-complacency? He hurried in. Perhaps she was already——

The nurse signed to him to be quiet, he had made a noise. He could not even forget himself far enough to be careful.

"Is she alive?" he whispered.

The nurse nodded. "But she must have quiet."

He went back to his own room.

If she were permitted to live! He saw the fresh springtime of their youth, when she gave him her love and entered his life as a devoted part of it. Those days full of colour—when did they begin to turn grey? Neither of them had noticed it, quietly the everyday feeling had stolen in. Year after year she had gone through her monotonous round of duties and seldom looked up. Nobody knew her; she was the pastor's wife in kitchen and dining-room. Why, if he himself had ever given it a thought, or if he had come in as a stranger, he would have found her tedious.

But now he saw clearly that it was her youthful feeling that had taken another form. That was what had made it possible for her to take up the daily toil without a murmur. It was love that had done it. Only it had no longer the surplus energy that finds vent in smiles and caresses. She did not even know what it was that gave her strength and will-power. And he had never told her, nor seen it himself.

But now he saw, and she should know it. The springtime in them would bloom again—and last. A happy impatience sprang up in him, as though he were going to propose to her again. He could scarcely wait till to-morrow, when the crisis was past,

to kneel to her and beg her: "Will you be my *real* wife?"

When the crisis was past! But *if*——

He *must* look disaster in the face. Perhaps that would be enough. Perhaps God would not try him harder, if he voluntarily bent under the blow and allowed his self-concern to be shattered. But it would have to be without reserve. For she *might* die. He forced himself to see this. Dead, lifeless, in her coffin. He could not bear it. But he would, he must. He saw the coffin, the flowers, he noted their scent, the scent of flowers strewn over his wife's coffin, the church, the people, all his congregation; he felt a pain at his heart, as though it were being squeezed and broken, and he thought: "Now I am dying," and rose—as he thought—to collapse for ever.

But he did not collapse. His body was erect, his limbs supple as steel, a clear, radiant light was kindled in his eyes, and at the same moment he felt within him the words he would speak at his wife's grave. They lay within him, complete and ready in an instant, a perfect work of art, as though made by God himself.

Half in an intoxication of gratitude, half in mortal dread, he went to the sick-room, where the nurse met him at the door and whispered: "The crisis has come. I think she will come through it. Wait till I call."

She thinks she will come through it! He fell on his knees and thanked God.

Then wait, wait patiently, till the nurse calls, and then in to his wife to begin the new life, their *real life together*.

He had to find something to occupy his thoughts, they were so excited. Reading was impossible, for his own thoughts swarmed into his brain. Perhaps he could hold them fast with the funeral oration which had leapt out fully formed at the moment when he thought he was going to die. He sat down and found that place in himself where the germ of the speech lay, and as he got up again and walked backwards and forwards it expanded in all its details, moving thoughts cast in imperishable words, fit to rouse the most sluggish souls. The sacred throes of the artist thrilled through him as the work took shape. His cheeks turned pale, his eyes grew moist, he was lifted away from time and place into the midst of the congregation, master of their collective consciousness.

God be praised that there was no need for him to make that speech now.

But one day, many years on, when he himself was soon to follow her, he would look forward to preaching this sermon over her. She deserved it. It should live as a memorial to her. He could see it, printed and published: "Funeral Oration by Pastor E. Barnes at His Wife's Grave, the——"

The door opened softly, and the nurse came in.

"It is all over."

Pastor Barnes looked at her without understanding.

The nurse went out, Pastor Barnes stayed in his chair.

Still he had not understood. . . .

Up to the very time of the interment he looked like a man who understood nothing.

When he was asked if he would speak himself at his wife's grave, he answered mechanically:

"I was writing her funeral oration at the moment she died."

Christian, who was present and heard this, turned from his father in disgust, went out into the garden, and was entirely alone in the world.

On the day of the funeral, when the first hymn had been sung, Barnes whispered like a helpless boy to his colleague of the neighbouring parish:

"Will you do it for me?"

His neighbour advanced to the coffin and spoke without preparation and hesitatingly.

After the ceremony Barnes forgot to thank people for their sympathy, took Christian by the hand, and went over to the parsonage.

Outside the door he stopped, looked at Christian, and gave himself up to weeping like a worthless, unhappy creature.

Christian saw his father for the first time, wept with him, and loved him.

VII. "The Open"

EVERY time Jens was alone with Lillebror, he slipped of his own accord into that silent, most primitive part of his ego which was entirely himself, before he knew there were things one might do and things that were forbidden. He was in the happy world of the language of heaven, and the feeling that they both knew all the things about each other which could not be put into words, did not fade.

Not only that, but it grew and came to include more than themselves.

One summer morning they came out early, while the dew still lay on the grass and twinkled at them.

Jens happened to look at the road and found that he was fond of it. He was fond of it in the same way as he was fond of Lillebror, and he thought he could see in the road that it liked him too.

He could feel this right into the soles of his feet, which tickled with the desire to touch the road. He pulled off his shoes and stockings.

Lillebror, who always did the same as Jens, pulled off his too and ran on ahead across the playground.

Jens followed him, looking at the soft prints of little naked feet; the tracks seemed to him so alive that he could not only see them, but *hear* and *feel* them.

Across the playground the tracks lay close together like teeth in a mouth. The sun came out from behind a cloud and shed its light over the earth. The playground was smiling.

Under the elder-tree by the churchyard wall stood Lillebror lost in wonder.

Jens went over to see what there was to amuse him.

There was nothing, but Lillebror's eyes were fathomless. Jens looked into them and saw that Lillebror *stood open*. Jens could see at the same time *what he was, and how he was aware that he was so*. The language of heaven was a bigger thing than he had known. He understood how God could be all-knowing.

When he turned to the elder-tree, he saw that it stood open like Lillebror, and he knew that was what the child was wondering at. He could see what the elder was, and how it was aware that it was so.

It was as though the elder breathed into him, and when the breath of the elder was in him he felt a great joy, which he knew; the joy of the language of heaven. The elder also spoke the language of heaven in its inmost being. For of course God had created it too.

There was something in him which insisted on his sitting down under it; Lillebror was already seating himself comfortably. So he too knew that the elder was inviting them in.

There were the three together, happy in that which we have no words to say. There they would sit a little while.

They did so, and time stood still in their hearts a little while.

But in their stomachs, which must have belonged to the closed world, time continued to move on, and by lunch-time it had left distinct traces: they were very hungry.

They got up. "The time must have passed without our knowing it," said Jens.

They went across the playground, but over by Jakob Hansen's gate they were stopped by a barking and loud cries of a woman's voice.

The yard dog had got loose and was rushing towards them. The servant-girl saw it, ran into the house screaming, and called out that Hector was killing the children.

Jakob Hansen and his men left their lunch, but dared not tackle the dog unarmed. One got a gun, another a spade, another a fork. All the time the girl was shrieking that the children must be bitten to death already; she had seen the dog rush at them, but dared not go to their help, for Hector was savage as a wolf.

It made a dash for the boys just as they had left the elder. In spite of their hunger they had not quite come back to the closed world, where we reflect and understand what danger is.

When Jens saw the dog come rushing at them with bristling coat and bared teeth, it did not occur to him that it meant him any harm. He simply saw that the dog *stood open*. He saw what Hector was, and how he was aware that he was so. "You're a good watch-dog," he said. "Nobody can get past you when you're loose in the yard."

And he put out his hand and patted him.

When Jakob Hansen and his men arrived with their weapons, the dog was quietly allowing himself to be patted by both the boys.

Jakob wiped the sweat from his forehead before he recovered himself sufficiently to go and take Hector by the collar.

“I can’t make it out,” he said; “it’s a miracle he didn’t bite them to pieces.”

But the girl, who had come up in rear of the men, understood. Now she had seen what a power there was in innocence, she said, and she was converted from that hour.

She wanted conversion too, for it was a long time since she had been innocent.

VIII. The Sunshine of the Playground

THE elder was not the only one. All things stood open; he saw what they were and how they knew that they were so. The hazel hedge was open, and he sat in his "chair" by the hour and held intercourse with it. A power which could not be seen, but could be plainly felt, penetrated him and rocked his soul in its own measure. A mother was not so gentle, a father not so strong, the food he ate not so near as this invisible power.

The hours passed, as he sat in its embrace in the open hedge; outside the hedge they passed, not inside it, where everything was "a little while." Outside the hedge people went by; they saw him and the hedge, and yet did not see them—saw only their outside.

But one day a man came in. Jens felt that he was not alone; he turned and saw that a smile had come into the hedge. The smile belonged to a face, the face belonged to a body, which stood out on the road. But the smile was in the hedge. Jens looked at the Professor's eyes and knew that not only the hedge but he himself stood open to them. The Professor's voice slipped into the hedge without the hedge closing, as it usually did when people spoke to him.

"Have you had the gift long?" said the voice.

"Yes," said Jens, though he didn't quite know whether he said it aloud or only thought it clearly.

"Is it people as well as things," asked the Professor, "or only things?"

"Only things," said Jens, "and sometimes animals."

"All kinds of things?"

"Mostly things that can grow," he said. "Stones and suchlike are—are more—dull. And people are too—too thick."

He stared at the Professor's eyes, astonished to find them outside the hedge. He had a feeling that they were within himself; that was, of course, because he stood open to the Professor.

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Before he knew it the Professor had nodded and was already some way down the road.

But the eyes, it seemed to Jens, stayed with him.

Then Kristen the sexton came to fetch a rake he had left in the hedge.

"What are you grinning at?" asked Kirsten.

Jens could not answer for laughing. And what was the use of saying it? He laughed still more, for Kristen stood open; he saw what he was, and how Kristen was aware that he was so.

—A day came when he felt the need of talking to somebody about it, but Lillebror was too small and the others did not understand it. Unless it was Christian Barnes, who had once told him that he had seen into heaven.

But since his mother's death Christian Barnes had begun to go to the grammar school in the market town, and when Jens went over to the parsonage, Christian showed him German, English and French grammars, and all that philological learning put the language of heaven to flight.

Besides, a certain strangeness and reserve had come over Christian, a shyness and a spirit of inquiry, something too grown up for his age.

Jens went no more to the parsonage, their roads had parted; but when they met occasionally, a remnant of the intimacy of their first hand-clasp still clung about them.

One day Christian Barnes stood in the garden watching the games of the village school-children. At last Jens thought he ought to go over to him. Christian looked so lonely.

"Aren't you in school to-day?" he asked.

"Monthly holiday," answered Christian.

"What's that?"

"We get a day off once a month."

What was it like at the grammar school?

"Oh, all right. Lots of lessons. And pretty brutal in the playground."

"What's brutal?"

"The big boys lam the little ones."

"They daren't do that here," said Jens. "As long as we've got Holger Enke we have peace."

"Yes," said Christian, "but what is it that makes Holger pull up when he gets wild himself?"

"What is it?"

Christian pointed to little Hansine, who came running past them with both dimples in action. There was a wake of smiling faces behind her.

"Once I was angry with my mother," said Christian, "and was never going to forgive her. I was quite wicked and *wanted* to hate. I went out of doors. But outside the sun was shining, and as I walked it shone the wickedness out of me. I kicked against it, but it was no use, I got good again. Hansine is like that. There's nothing to be done about it; everybody is good when she smiles."

"It's funny you should say that," said Jens, "for I have always thought she was like a patch of sunlight on the floor. But that's nonsense."

"It's nonsense if the grown-ups hear it," said Christian. "Do you know anything of the grown-ups?"

"Know anything?" Jens wondered whether Christian meant that they "stood open."

"I know a lot about the grown-ups," Christian continued. "I can tell you——"

He looked as if he would like to tell something but was ashamed of it. He looked neither good nor nice. Whatever he knew about the grown-ups, it was nothing to do with their "standing open."

Christian gave Jens a look as if there were twenty years between them.

"Good-bye," he said, and went away.

But he came back at once.

"If there weren't a few like Hansine," he said, "everybody would go straight to hell. Now you know it."

With that he went off again.

In the garden he met the pretty parlour-maid, whom until quite recently he had looked upon in much the same way as Hansine. He gave her a shy glance.

"What makes you look as if you'd done something you mustn't?" she said.

He felt inclined to spit in her face.

A vague feeling of sympathy gripped her. She thought it was because the boy had no mother.

"You have always been a good boy, Christian," she said, as she

took him in her arms and kissed him. Immediately after, she pushed him away.

"But, Christian!" she cried; "what in the world——"

She looked at him searchingly, and then took his wrist cautiously but firmly.

"What sort of schoolfellows have you got at the grammar school?" she said. "They're not spoiling you, I hope?"

"Let me go!" he said furiously. "I hate you! I hate the whole lot of you!"

He tore himself free and ran into the field.

Yes, she was the right one to ask if his schoolfellows were spoiling him! Hussy!

He began to cry from a mixture of sorrow and anger.

To tell the truth, he had been in love with her. As if you couldn't be in love with a grown-up person because you went to school! That's just what you could. Grown-ups and children could easily be in love with each other, but grown-ups and grown-ups—there was a devil of a lot of love in it with them. Thanks, he knew what they were. And she was like the rest.

He'd just like her to know that Jens the herdsman had dragged him into the barn one day and they had hidden in the straw, where they could see all over the threshing-floor. There she came with the farmer's man, who pawed her all over, while her face, which in the ordinary way reminded him of Hansine's, got swollen and flushed and ugly, and then——

And then the herdsman, while this was going on! And himself, every time he had looked at her face since and remembered the change that came over it!

If he could have had his way he would have sent that herdsman straight into hell without a moment's hesitation.

But the grown-ups themselves, the hypocritical devils! Now he knew all their mysterious hints, which they chuckled over.

Even those who had children.

Little Helen Strömstad! Poor good little Helen!

That playtime on Thursdays, when he always walked and talked with her, was the only good time he had.

One day she took him home in their playtime. And there he was introduced to "Mother" and "Uncle Hans." This was Bjerg, the lottery collector.

When he came home he told his father about it and saw the

familiar grown-up wrinkle on his forehead and the covert twist of the mouth. He knew beforehand what his father would say, and it came right enough:

"I would rather you did not go to Helen Strömstad's home."

"Why? She is a nice girl."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Pastor Barnes. "Little Helen is a sweet and good girl. And I have no objection to your talking to her. Quite the contrary—I might almost say. But—but you must not go home with her. I can't give you a reason.—You will understand later on."

Oh, yes, he understood later on.

One playtime, when Helen had not come, he looked through the leaves into the garden and there sat Bjerg and Helen's mother, and their faces were just like those of the farmer's man and the parlour-maid in the barn.

"Is Bjerg your mother's brother or your father's?" he asked Helen afterwards.

"Neither," said she. "He is no relation at all; we only call him uncle because he's such a good old friend of mother and me."

Later on he found out that Helen's mother's name was not Mrs. Strömstad, but Miss Hansen.

Yes, he had seen grown-ups when they were hiding together, and now he was always lying in wait for the sly twitchings of their faces which disclosed what they were ashamed to acknowledge but took a secret delight in.

He was filled with profound disgust, but it was no protection against temptation.

Little Helen, who walked pure and innocent among grown-up people, little Helen, who was so dainty and delicate that she might have been an angel, her he loved, and he could have killed anybody who told her what he knew about her mother.

His feeling for her was at the same time one of respectful worship and watchful protection.

IX. Gone

GONE. Eyes looked about in all directions in a vain attempt to penetrate that wicked GONE which surrounds us on all sides and may suddenly take our things when we have just used them.

Lillebror's spade was gone, the little spade with the red-painted blade and the brown handle. He had just been playing with it, and now it was spirited away and lay asleep somewhere in the invisible GONE!

"I'll find it all right," said Jens, for there were tears in Lillebror's eyes.

"Yes, but I'm sure GONE is a big place," said Lillebror, "and it can move about, because Mother says it's nowhere and everywhere."

"I shall find it all the same," said Jens; "I promise you."

Lillebror looked up at him and grasped the fact that Jens was very big. Now that he knew he would get his spade back, he was happy and began to play with a cart.

After searching for some time, Jens realized that he would not be able to keep his promise that day.

The next day he went to the school treat; the day after, he forgot to look, and the day after that, Lillebror lay ill in bed and had no use for his spade.

He stayed in bed and did not say very much. But one day he asked if Jens had found his spade.

"Not yet, but I shall find it all right when you are well again," said Jens.

"I'd like to have it here," said Lillebror.

"Then I'll look," said Jens. He went out and looked for it a little while, till Annine Clausen's Niels Peter came by with a shrike he had shot. Then they started throwing stones at a gatepost, and when they had finished that, it was evening.

The next day Lillebror did not ask for his spade, he asked for nothing.

The night passed, and when Jens got up in the morning his

mother was standing by Lillebror's bed and the sexton's wife was bending over it and listening. Then she rose slowly and said:

"He *has* gone home."

And as the mother did not answer a word, the woman went on:

"Our little friend is gone."

Jens could not move his feet; he stood fixed in Lillebror's own notion of the omnipresent GONE. He thought someone was saying that Lillebror had gone away to find his spade because Jens had forgotten to look for it.

Lillebror lay there stiff and white, and his golden locks seemed still to curl as in life about his forehead.

He looked nearly the same as that day a long, long time ago when Jens thought he was dead, the day when he rose like a bubble from the bottomless depths of his eyes up into the clear daylight and gave Jens a share in his memory of the place they had come from.

The sexton's wife whispered to his mother—he could hear it quite well, as though from far away:

"He doesn't understand that the little one is dead," said the sexton's wife.

He stood looking at the tightly shut eyelids. They would never open any more. He knew that Lillebror had sunk again, deep down into the bottomless eyes, to the place where he had lain that day long, long ago, looking back at the country from which he had come. And this time a longing had come over him and he had slipped back altogether. Jens was filled with an unaccountable feeling of happy peace.

"He can't make it out at all," whispered the sexton's wife; "but it will come soon enough."

He remembered how he had met Lillebror deep down in his eyes and how his own had become bottomless too; and he made an effort to come deeper in, farther away, and find him again. But at a certain distance he always came to an invisible gate through which he could not pass, and he shook his head.

"He *won't* understand," whispered the sexton's wife; "you can see by his looks he won't believe it."

"I can't, Lillebror," said Jens within himself, "I can't come so far."

A kind of soft air enveloped him, almost like Lillebror's breath, and he felt a weak but distinct and familiar pressure

of small fingers on his left hand. He turned round in gladness—in the empty room he saw none but the sexton's wife and his mother staring at him intently.

Then he bent over Lillebror's bed and looked with their eyes at the white face and the stiffened fingers that would nevermore be able to clasp his hand softly. Sobbing with hopeless grief, he fell on his knees and laid his face on the bed, and wept and wept till he could neither think nor stir.

Then they took him and carried him half unconscious into the parlour, where they laid him on a sofa.

"Ah, yes," said the sexton's wife, as she spread a rug over him, "when at last he understood it, he understood it far too well."

X. In the Elder-tree

THEN came a time of restless searching and waiting. He hoped for a repetition of the little pressure of the hand which he had felt immediately after his brother's death; he waited for some sign that Lillebror was living as an angel and thinking of him; he watched with all his senses strained, but it was just as when he had been looking for the spade: Lillebror was gone, perhaps he was close at hand, perhaps far away, perhaps he did not exist any more. His thoughts grew tired and dull, and yet they hurt him, as one's legs may hurt when one has walked a terribly long way and had no chance of resting. And the days succeeded one another, long, bright days, made for playing in, but he had not the slightest wish to play.

He felt the need of talking to someone, but there was nobody to talk to about Lillebror; nobody had really known him, and nobody knew where he was. "Now he is lying in his grave," they said one day, and "Now he is in heaven," the next.

And the days succeeded one another every morning, long and bright, and the boys played in the playground, where Lillebror's footprints had once smiled at him. Shouting and yelling they trampled the place where those tracks had been. He himself scarcely had the heart to walk there.

One day he was walking along the road by the hedge, peeling a willow rod. A little fellow of about four, with a pot-belly and cheeks like a cherub, came out of a hole in the hedge. He was a petted only child, a little flat-headed rustic, stuffed with dainties but healthy enough to stand them. Accustomed to be given whatever he pointed at, he went up to Jens and stretched out his hand for the white willow rod.

"Me want that."

Jens held it in the air, while he fixed his eyes on the little fists, round as balls. The little one stamped and repeated:

"Me want that, me do."

Instantly Jens struck him across the face with the rod as hard as he could.

The little one set up a deafening roar, and somebody came through the gap.

It was Holger Enke.

Jens saw his eyes stiffen. A bigger boy had struck a smaller one. He knew what would happen. And there was nobody about to tell Holger when to stop. He already felt his ribs smashed and his face pounded to a jelly.

Besides his fear he was stricken with sorrow, not for what he had done, but because Holger had always been his friend and protector and was now against him.

This showed in his eyes, and Holger stopped before striking him and asked with mingled surprise and threatening:

"What did you do it for?"

Jens honestly tried to tell the truth.

"He was so fat."

"I asked you why you struck him." Holger came a step nearer.

Jens burst into tears, for he didn't know how to say it any better. He heard Holger ask the question again right above his head, and he hiccuped out, half dead with fear:

"It came over me. I couldn't bear him to be here. And so it came over me."

Where was the pain? He didn't feel any blows. He was still on his feet. He raised his head cautiously to see what was coming, as it was such a long time.

He met Holger's eyes, which saw him and yet did not see him. There was something in them which could not find room.

"Did it come over you?" said Holger quietly.

Jens cried aloud, because he could hear that Holger pitied him, so it must be terrible that it had come over him.

Holger felt in one waistcoat pocket and then in another. He had tears in his eyes and bit his lip hard, till the blood came. Then he tried his jacket pockets, which were empty. In his right trouser pocket he found a knife and looked at it in hesitation as it lay in his hand. It was an old one and the blade was hacked, but he had nothing better on him.

"Would you like to have it?" he said. "It was good once."

Jens said nothing, for he couldn't understand.

Holger put the knife into his hand.

"You must keep it. Now go home.—Do you ever pray to God?"

"Yes."

"That's right. That's the only thing you have to do."

He turned towards the little one and carried him on his arm into the field. From behind the hedge Jens heard him say:

"If you don't tell about it at home, you shall have a cake on Sunday."

Only when he had reached his chair in the hazel hedge did Jens know that the reason why he had struck the child was an absurd idea that the little fellow had eaten Lillebror's food and wanted to take his toys. . . .

His head still hurt him. Every morning, when the day brought games to the others, it brought him the same weary headache.

One Sunday, when the playground was quiet, he felt he could no longer bear that pain in his head and still exist. Everything he looked at hurt.

He went in under the elder by the churchyard wall and sat in the shade of its dark leaves so as not to see anything. He rested his neck against a branch. Ah, that did him good. The elder stood still in the motionless air. He almost thought it was taking trouble not to make any noise with its branches or leaves. It was company for him, he was no longer alone, and he nestled closer against its stem. He got as near to it as he could, and when he could come no closer he began to approach it from within. A tenderness and a devotion, stronger and less disturbed than he could feel for a human being, passed from his heart into this peaceful elder, which, without making any fuss about it, opened his head and took out the headache; and it seemed to him that what came in its place was something which he and the elder thought in common.

It was so still about him and within him that he not only saw and felt the elder, but positively *heard* its inner being. No, not just heard, for it was that well-known thing which was seeing and hearing and feeling all at the same time—it was the language of heaven. It spread through his whole being, all sense of loss was gone. A swelling word possessed his heart: Everything. And something or other, no doubt the elder, answered: "Yes, everything is here." He knew he was sitting under the elder, but for that matter it might be everywhere, there was no longer any far or near, long or short. "Everything is here—Lillebror too?" He had hardly thought it when he felt the soft living

pressure of little fingers and he asked, but only in thought: "Are you here really?" And within him he heard Lillebror's voice say: "Yes." He asked: "How can you speak within me?" Lillebror answered: "Why, you're standing open, I can go right in." "Ah, it is the language of heaven that makes me stand open," said Jens. "But you, are you always near by, or sometimes far away?" "Neither," said Lillebror. "Like the language of heaven," said Jens; and Lillebror answered: "Yes, the language of heaven is nowhere and everywhere." "Nobody can hear it, and nobody can drown it." It must have been the elder that said this. "Every time you speak it, I shall know," said Lillebror. "And then will you come?" asked Jens. "Then I shall *be* here," said Lillebror. "I understand," said Jens; "you are in it always. And now I am with you." And he stayed sitting still with him.

After a long time the elder stiffened its branches, and it seemed to him to say: "Now you must go out."

As he went across the playground he laughed at himself for behaving clumsily for the fun of it. It was silly, the way he was walking step by step, getting on slowly. "That's just like when we talk," he thought, "we say one word after another, and it takes a long time, and yet it's only bits and pieces we manage to find out or say. In the language of heaven we say everything at once without speaking a single word. And in the open every place is just exactly where we are. Outside in the closed some things are near by and some far away. And we have to go after them.—But the ones who made up the fairy stories, they must have been in the open. And the Professor—he sees it. If only he wasn't so old!"

He was lonely, but happy, among the busy people around him. When his parents mourned, he saw that to them Lillebror was gone, perhaps near at hand, perhaps far away, perhaps nowhere at all. He himself had only to be open and they were together, closer than ever before. "You're standing open and I can go right in," Lillebror had said, and every day it proved that he was right. That was what made a bright and happy look come into his face when his parents talked about the little one. They looked at him in surprise, and his mother said: "One would think you were glad your brother is dead!" He could see that she came near to feeling abhorrence for him, and he looked at her with a strange, superior pity, because she did not know and nobody

could help her to know. With it was blended a touch of morbid pleasure at being judged unjustly. But this was usually drowned in a longing for his mother to care for him as before.

At times he thought of confiding in the Professor, who "saw into the open" and yet was grown up, and whom the grown-ups would therefore listen to if he explained the thing to them. But it never came to anything. The fact was, when he was alone he had no need of help.

But one day he had a strange experience, which at the same time restored him to his mother's arms.

He was sitting in the room where Lillebror had died, and where he had once seen him wake and rise like a bubble from the depths of his bottomless eyes, which were still looking back at the heaven from which he had come. He was thinking of the day of Lillebror's death, when he had tried within himself to follow him along the road he had gone. Now he was open, Lillebror was with him, and he thought: "I wonder if I can do so now," and Lillebror whispered within him: "Yes. Quiet—quiet—the language of heaven within you—the language of heaven without you—the language of heaven everywhere. Nothing but the language of heaven." He repeated it to himself at least a hundred times, and as he did so the room, everything, everywhere was gone, he was nowhere, and in a flash he *saw* Lillebror, not with his eyes but with his *whole self*, saw not his body, but Lillebror *himself*—and was caught up from his chair, while his heart began to throb so that he thought it would go to pieces.

His mother gazed anxiously at him. Her hands, which had caught him up from the chair, were still trembling.

"Jens!" she cried. It was a little while before he could command his voice to ask what was the matter.

"You looked as if you were dead," she said, "and you had your brother's face.—Don't go away from me as he did," she whispered and clutched him to her.

He laid his hand on her arm and said with a seriousness and quiet authority which frightened her:

"Lillebror is not dead. He is living."

She pressed her hand to her heart and said slowly and hesitatingly, like one repeating a lesson—he could positively see a catechism before him:

"Ye-es—ye-es. He is living in heaven.—But you mustn't go

thinking about it so much," she added, now entirely in the present.

From that day she had no thought on earth but Jens, partly because he was her only child, partly because she was afraid that, left to himself, he might kill himself with longing for the little one.

Though she scarcely had more than a perfunctory belief in a life after death, she was nevertheless a prey to a superstitious terror that Lillebror might return to fetch his playmate.

XI. The Cryptic Smile

THE days went by without his noticing it particularly. In the open there was no time, and outside it he grew up together with his schoolfellows and never thought that they were all getting bigger. And his parents were still the same. His mother's external face he never got to know. He only saw its changing expression; her face was and always would be incorporeal. It was different with his father, who always exhibited all there was in his face and always looked the same age, as though he had been born long before we invented the art of printing. His countenance was unchanging as the face of the big grandfather's clock, which was never tired of repeating the same ticking and always ready and willing to point out how far we had gone.

But then one fine sunny day Holger Enke, Annine Clausen's Niels Peter, Kristian Mogensen, pretty Tine, and the joiner's Hansine all left school. It made him so unaccountably heavy-hearted; he felt like a little paltry thing that nobody took any notice of. The day they were confirmed he sat in church and looked at these schoolfellows, who would now count as grown up, while he still had many years of school. Hansine stood in the row facing the clergyman, pure and sweet as a wild hedge-rose; the pastor laid his hand on her head: "Hansine Marie Jørgensen, do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways?" She looked with her forget-me-not eyes straight into the pastor's and her silvery voice said confidently: "Yes." It was the joiner's little Hansine, whose dimples had often brought him joy and goodness. He thought he could see her growing away from school, through life and right into heaven, always in a beautiful, smiling renunciation of the devil and all his works. He felt a sucking at his heart and thought he could never be happy again, because a boundary had been set up between him and those who had now become all at once grown up. It could be seen that Tine was so already; she renounced the devil with dignity and intelligence. Niels Peter was letter-perfect in his abhorrence

of him and believed in God in three articles which did not lack a comma. Kristian Mogensen delivered his confession of faith in a confidential whisper, but Holger Enke, whose shoulders were already as broad as a man's and whose head was on a level with the pastor's, flabbergasted the congregation by bursting into tears when the questions about renunciation and belief came to him. Instead of returning the correct monosyllable "Yes," he sobbed out, at once protesting and appealing: "Yes, I *do*—I do *really*."

After the service Jens wandered about like a lonely exile, with a feeling of loss and of longing that could not be satisfied. He went off to his chair in the hazel hedge.

Hansine came past in all her white finery, arm-in-arm with a girl who had been confirmed two whole years ago. There! you could see she kept among the grown-ups already, she wouldn't so much as stop and say "Good day" to him.

When she did so nevertheless, with both her dimples looking as if it was all nonsense about her leaving school, it made him so happy and at the same time so sad that tears came into his eyes, and Hansine exclaimed, affectionately as a little mother:

"But what are you crying for, little Jens? Has anyone been bullying you?"

He rushed out of the hedge and hid in the garden. "Little Jens!—Been bullying you!"—Oh, yes, she was grown up right enough. They could never be chums again. She and the others were farther away from him than Lillebror, who was dead. . . .

One day his father came and asked him, with a face bigger and rounder than usual, whether he would like to go to the University; if so he would have to leave the village school and go to the grammar school in the market town.

The main thing with him was to leave school like Hansine and the rest, and so he said yes.

So he left and went to the grammar school, and there he met Christian Barnes again, who seemed not to have grown much, looked very pale, and had black marks under his eyes.

He could not see any sign of Christian being glad to see him.

But when Jens had taken up his quarters with a hunch-backed tailor who had a good-looking, pale face and a military moustache, he was visited by Christian nearly every day. For the tailor's garden was next to Helen Strömstad's.

He felt very small and very green in comparison with Christian, whose prying eyes were always discovering people's secret thoughts, and whose talk sounded so knowing and grown up. If Christian had not put him up to it he would never have discovered why the tailor so often dropped his work, looked into the mirror, twisted his colonel's moustache, and practised a range of expressions, from cruel coldness, icy scorn, to roguish seduction and manly devotion.

The two boys had ample opportunity for observing him, as Jens's room was in a wing that had been added to the house and its window looked straight into the tailor Henriksen's workshop.

"You think it's vanity that makes him look at himself in the glass?" said Christian. "No, no, my friend, it's passion. He's madly in love with Helen Strömstad's mother. But he torments her, that is his cruel delight. That's why he sits there enjoying the crushing scorn he can put into his look. He thinks she's hopelessly in love with him, and she's to suffer a bit more before he takes pity on her; but every time he lets an opportunity go by without declaring his love, he's torturing himself, and you can bet your life he lies awake at night tossing on his bed; it isn't only being a tailor that makes him pale."

"But how can he imagine she's in love with him?" asked Jens.

"How the hell could he think anything else?" said Christian, who swore as readily as any clergyman's son. "You see, when he gives her his crushing look over the garden fence, she gets red and confused and runs indoors. Of course that's because she thinks he's expressing his contempt of her for having a child when she isn't married, and for being mixed up with Bjerg the lottery collector into the bargain."

"Is she mixed up with him?"

"I should say so! But not a word of that to Helen. Remember that!"

"Of course not. But Henriksen, does he really think——"

"Why shouldn't he? He sits opposite his glass, he's got a handsome face, and his hump doesn't show in front."

Christian laughed as he pointed to Henriksen, who was sitting on his table with his legs crossed, sucking the blood from his forefinger.

"That comes of fancying yourself a hero when you're brandishing a tailor's lance."

Jens looked at him in astonishment. It was incredible what knowledge Christian had of the thoughts of men.

But it happened now and then that Christian watched him with the same expression of surprise. He did so a moment later, when Jens remarked with slow deliberation:

"Bjerg the lottery collector—he is worm-eaten right down to the roots. He will be very afraid of dying."

"What the devil makes you say that?" exclaimed Christian.

"It is something I can see," said Jens, and fell to thinking of the great difference there was between what he and Christian Barnes knew about men.

The more he wondered over the two worlds that exist in human beings, the more eager he was to see them "stand open" and to find out how far they were from "themselves."

His gift of seeing them "as they were" grew with practice, but there was always one who defied his clairvoyance.

Old sail-maker Berg, who always stood with his hands deep in his trouser pockets outside his door, opposite Frederik VII's statue in the square, was firmly closed. He had been all round the world and seen everything life had to show. Jens would have liked to know what Berg was, and how he was aware that he was so. And Berg stood every day outside his door with his clear-cut, immovable face turned to the square, but the man was bolted and barred. . . .

Jens spent his holidays at home, and every summer day he was to be seen sitting in his chair in the hazel hedge and looking far beyond Annine Clausen and the others, who went their way along the quiet road by the quickset hedges.

He saw his old schoolfellows working in the fields; they already had the ways of grown-up men. Now and then they came past the hedge and greeted him with a nod and a smile. But it was not like their old school-days, they had a new look in their faces. There was a cryptic smile, which made them sometimes handsomer, sometimes uglier, than they were at school. This smile put a great distance between them and him.

The only one who was the same was Holger Enke. Much bigger he was, and the cryptic smile was also to be seen in his face, but when he drove past the hedge, said "Whoa!" and pulled up, the secret world of the grown-ups faded out of his face and Jens encountered a pair of round eyes which were still go-

ing to school and could never succeed in expressing all the goodness that lay concealed beneath them and wanted so badly to show itself in them. Holger, as he always had been, was helplessly in love with everything that was small and slender and delicate. Before starting his horses again, he always delivered himself of the set phrase: "If ever anybody wants to do anything to you, come to me." The cart rumbled off, and Jens had a view of a back it was safe to hide behind.

XII. The Crime

IT was a mild day in autumn. All the trees stood as still as if they were trying to remember the whole summer before they let their leaves go. Jens Dahl was at home for a couple of days' half-term holiday and was chatting over a cup of coffee with his mother, who was waiting for Annine Clausen to come back after giving her cattle a look. She was due to finish the washing that afternoon, but she was a long time coming.

When at last she came, she could not touch the washing to begin with, and it was all she could do to take a cup of coffee.

"I feel it in my legs," she said, "and in my knees, and all over me. It's just as if it was me it had happened to. O Lord, O Lord, what a strange thing life is, to be sure. And folks that we know, too, that have been going about among us since they were little children, not like somebody you read about in the paper! What do you say, Madam Dahl?"

What should Madam Dahl say, when she hadn't heard a word yet?

"O Lord, haven't you heard? Am I the first to bring the news? Well, it only happened this very morning. And now she's lying dead, the pretty, gentle girl that she was! And he! I can't believe it, said I to Martine when she told me. She works at the same farm as those two, and she ran over to me and told me, because she *had* to tell somebody. You see, Martine and my Niels Peter, they're sweethearts like, though I think they're only a couple of children, and that I've told them often enough—but, God forgive me, Hansine and Holger weren't any older! And now Hansine's dead."

"Is Hansine dead?"

"Ah, you may well say, is Hansine dead? Dead she is, the joiner's little Hansine with her two pretty dimples and her gentle eyes, she's dead this very morning, she's killed. And it was Holger Enke that killed her."

Mrs. Dahl clutched at the table as though she was afraid of falling, but Jens rose slowly and sat down again just as mechani-

cally. The news had not yet penetrated him. On the contrary, it seemed to come out from within him. He had a feeling that this was something familiar. Although he had never imagined it, it seemed to him at that moment that in his heart he had always known that one day Holger would kill Hansine. It had to be, and now it had happened. He could not exclaim like his mother in terrified wonder:

"Is it really true?"

Annine nodded.

"You may well say that, Madam Dahl, is it really true? That's what I said to Martine. It's impossible, I said. But she knew the whole story. For Holger was fond of Hansine, said she, but he wasn't fond of her like a man is, said Martine. No, he must have been fond of her like a devil, I said, but then Martine shook her head and started to explain just like a Bible. He was fond of her like an angel, said she. I believe he could have said his prayers to her. He wasn't like the other men, who ask us to marry them and kiss us and squeeze us when we say yes, or sometimes kiss us and squeeze us and worse than that, without asking first. No, Holger, he was like what you see in books. She was something sacred, the hem of her dress was like the cloth on the altar. Yes, I almost believe he thought we could get our sins forgiven us by looking at Hansine, said Martine—you know she was always such a one for reading and she can talk just like a book. I've seen him go and help her, she said, at harvest-time and whenever she had any hard work to do. He used to help the whole lot of us, tied all our sheaves for us, but when he tied a sheaf for Hansine, you'd have thought it was a nosegay, the way he took hold of it, just because it was Hansine's, though maybe she hadn't touched it at all. If it was the most educated man, he couldn't have been more refined than Holger, said Martine, and then she began to cry over him."

"Well, but how could he go and kill her?" asked Mrs. Dahl.

"Just what I said to Martine," said Annine. "Well, said she, it was after he'd ravished her, and he couldn't bear to see her any more, and so he killed her."

"You don't say he'd——?" Mrs. Dahl checked herself, thinking of her son's immature age.

"Aye," said Annine, "there isn't a crime Holger hasn't committed this very morning, for I've not done yet. How could he lay hands on her like that, said I to Martine, after all you've

told me about him? Well, said she, it was all through Hansine getting into trouble. The miller's man from Vissingrød Mill had seduced her at an outing they had in the summer.—Ah, you look surprised, Madam Dahl, but we mustn't judge Hansine too harshly. When we're young they go and tempt us from morning to night, if we have any looks at all. And there's no knowing what may happen; we may be honest and straight every day and hour of the year, and be weak just for five minutes and then get punished for the rest of our lives. I'd been a good girl all my time, but I lost my wits just for a moment one cattle-show evening—and then I had Niels Peter. And I've gone straight both before and since. And that lad from Vissingrød, he has a way with him, they say, that no woman can resist.—And they all knew at the farm that Hansine was in trouble, says Martine, before it began to show. Holger was the only one who didn't see it; if she'd been nine months gone it would never have struck him what was the matter, says Martine. But then it came one evening when the new lad was there and Holger was playing his concertina and they all sat and listened to him on the stone wall under the big willow—Hansine wasn't there, she kept to herself lately, from shame and sorrow, as you can guess—and then the new lad, he says, not knowing anything about Holger: 'How long's it going to be before Hansine has her baby?' says he. Holger got up, but the foreman, who knew Holger and turned as white as a piece of chalk when he saw his eyes, he stood up between them and he said to Holger with a shaky voice, for he knew he was risking his life, as he said afterwards: 'That's not the man who deserves it, Holger,' he said. 'You keep it for the one who did it. And that's the miller's man at Vissingrød.' Holger stood and looked at him, and the foreman stood and looked back, pale in the face, but he stuck to his words. Holger seemed to be thinking hard and he twisted the concertina in his hands till it fell to pieces quite quietly, said Martine. Then Holger went back to his room without saying a word. And it was a good while before any of them could think properly. The first of them that said anything was the foreman and what he said was: 'Now the Vissingrød lad hasn't many days to live.' Then Martine slipped in and got her hat and ran all the way to Vissingrød, knocked up the miller's man out of his sleep, and warned him. Not for his own sake, said she, but so that Holger should not be a murderer. 'Now I'm going to be punished for

all the wrong I've done,' said the man, 'but thanks for warning me. Maybe I can save my body till I've had time to save my soul. For I know very well that death is on my track.' Next morning he was gone, nobody knows where to. But Holger began to have his eye on Hansine, and then it came this morning when he was standing in the barn with the new lad filling the sacks with wheat, and Hansine walked across the yard into the cow-shed. Holger watched her go and got so heavy about the eyes, the lad said. 'Oil this chaff-cutter,' Holger told him, 'while I go and see to the horses.' And just think, instead of that he went straight over to the cow-shed, where she was standing, and threw her down on to a bundle of straw and ravished her. She was still lying there when the police came, just as he'd left her. And then, that's the terrible thing, he took the muck-fork and drove it right through her throat—fancy, the wounds were all covered with manure—and then he went into the stable and hanged himself."

"Did he hang himself?"

"Yes—what was he to do after all the crimes he'd committed, but make an end of himself?"

"Mercy on us, then they're both dead!" Mrs. Dahl thought of all the times she had seen them running about and playing in the schoolyard.

"No," said Annine, "no such luck. Holger didn't manage to die, because the cowman came into the stable for a halter for the mare that takes the milk round and he ran slap into Holger as he was dangling from one of the saddle-hooks. The man whipped out his knife and cut him down. He thought it was too late, but there was some life in him yet, and when the cowman began to pull him about he opened his eyes, looked round for a bit, and then said: 'I see, I'm meant to have my punishment in this life too. Take me up to the police-station.' The cowman didn't understand a word of it, but then the dairymaid came running in from the cow-shed, shrieking and laughing and having hysterics, and then the cowman went in, and there wasn't much mistake about what he saw. Now the police have been, and the doctor, he's still with the dairymaid, they say she's lost her wits, but the doctor says she may get them back. And now Hansine's died a horrible death, and they've taken Holger, and his mother's a widow and lost first her husband many years ago and now she's lost her only son like this. And life, Madam

Dahl, that's a thing we've come into without knowing how it happened, and none of us knows how we shall come out of it again. And here I am, and all this has happened to people we know, just outside our own door, and now I've got to go to the wash-tub and wring out the clothes, as if nothing had happened. Oh, dear, what a strange thing life is, to be sure!"

When Annine had gone out to her washing Mrs. Dahl stroked her son's hair and said: "It was not good for you to hear all that."

No, it was not. The visionary peace with which he had received the first news of the crime vanished when Annine began to tell of its details. He realized the outrage in all its grim horror. This murderer he had known, talked to, touched, nay, he had been his friend. He felt he was tainted, as though Holger even then had been a criminal; he thought his mind would not rest till he had begged forgiveness of Hansine for having been friendly with Holger.

But Hansine was dead. The joiner's little Hansine! His old fancy, that she was like the patch of sunlight under the school-room window, recurred to him. He saw her in church facing the clergyman and renouncing the devil and all his works in purity and confidence. Now she was dead, defiled and mutilated. Now and for evermore the earth was dark and cold.

He went to her funeral, though his mother asked him not to go. He was glad to be there. They all came, big and small, who had been at school with her. Pastor Barnes advanced to the coffin and spoke. "We are helpless in the face of this," he began, and went on faltering helplessly, while the tears slowly ran down his cheeks. Then they lowered her into the grave. Many children's eyes followed the coffin with an empty look, as if their soul had been taken from them. Little Hans Olsen, whom Holger had once picked up and washed, he was there too. He cried. He stood beside his little friend, Ellen Nielsen; they were both crying and they held each other's hands and forgot to be bashful about being seen so.

People went home in a crowd. Jens stole from one group to another and listened in the hope of hearing some word that might explain this incomprehensible thing. But they talked mostly about the parson's words. "Barnes is not the man he was," they said; "not since his wife died." One of them shook his head: "He seems a bit clearer and simpler now, but that's

not it. He doesn't carry you with him"; and his neighbour declared: "It's almost as if it was one of us that stood up and preached. What he says is only what we're all thinking. We're helpless, he says. Well, what's the use of saying that? That's just what we are. Helpless and not helped."

Helpless and unhelpt, Jens made his way to town. There he came across Dorte the basket-woman, who had been in to the baker's to get her basket filled. He had always liked Dorte, whether it was herself or what she had in her basket. He felt he must speak to her, and told her he had been home to see Hansine buried.

"Aye," said Dorte, "now she's dead, the joiner's little Hansine. And mercy on us Holger's been and gone and turned murderer!"

"Been and gone and turned——!" He looked at her in astonishment—the air seemed to brighten almost as when the sunlight suddenly fell through the schoolroom window and smiled on the floor—he looked at Dorte, who stood open, and he followed her simple perception of life, followed it as far as Holger Enke, who appeared before him gentle and good-hearted, the kind protector of everything small and weak, but who was now helplessly miserable, because he had been and gone and destroyed everything both for himself and others.

Dorte went on, but Jens stood for a long time gazing into the world where things and men are open. . . . He went and sat in the summer-house in Henriksen's garden so as to come well into the open, possibly feel the presence of Lillebror—and perhaps of Hansine; but he was disturbed by hushed voices in Helen Strömstad's garden. It was Bjerg the lottery collector talking to her mother.

"Well, we may just as well go and get married," he said.

"You know very well I won't do that," replied Miss Hansen.

"But if you're hurt by the way that hunch-backed tailor and all the others look you up and down, then I really can't see why——"

"You know perfectly well that it's for Helen's sake. Her father's family have put up a sum of money for her, which she'll get when she is grown up or married. And they made it a condition that if I married, Helen should get nothing."

"What the devil has it to do with them?"

"Revenge. They were furious because I wouldn't hand over Helen to them."

"But Helen would come into my money if we were married."

"It isn't so much as she'll get if I remain unmarried."

"You ought also to consider that when Helen grows up and finds out you've been living——"

"That she shall never find out."

"You forget gossiping tongues."

"No; but Helen will believe me if I tell her it's all lies. I don't exactly understand, either, why you're suddenly so set upon our getting married."

"I'm not so sure that the reasons you give are the only ones. Perhaps you have to consider the director of the drapery business?"

"There's no longer anything between us."

"But that was how you got put into the branch here."

"That's ancient history."

"And then your trips to Copenhagen."

"Nothing but business.—But even supposing——"

"Well, there's an ugly name for that——"

Miss Hansen's voice trembled as she answered:

"There's one thing you've got to fix in your mind, and that is that you and everybody else don't matter in the least, but for Helen's future I'll sacrifice body and soul."

"That sounds very fine. But I wonder if you haven't some other motive—your own pleasure."

"You're hardly the one to throw that in my teeth."

"No," whispered Bjerg, "married or unmarried, we'll still keep that."

Jens stole back into his room. His thoughts whirled round in his head and produced a feeling of homelessness, as though neither the open nor the closed world had any room for him.

In the evening he went to see Christian Barnes, as he could not bear being alone any longer.

Christian had a good deal to tell him about Holger Enke's examination at the police-court. They had asked him why he had killed Hansine, and Holger had answered that he knew it was a mistake. It ought to have been the miller's man, but it fell upon her instead. "And then I suppose it was because I couldn't see her any more after what I'd done to her."—Why had he done it? "It came over me, when I saw what she'd allowed him to do." More than that they could not get out of him. And then

he asked so imploringly for a death sentence, "for that cowman unfortunately came too soon."

They sat for a long while in the twilight without saying anything. At last Jens spoke:

"I have a little brother who is dead. Sometimes I almost think he is to be envied for never having the chance to grow up."

He did not expect any answer, and none came for a good while. Then Christian said:

"Yes, you can bet your life."

"What?"

"That anyone is to be envied who dies before he grows up—or gets to know too much about the grown-ups."

Jens stared at Christian, who looked as pale as a ghost in the dim light.

"You said you knew so much about the grown-ups," Jens began. "Can you understand what Holger did to Hansine—before he killed her?"

A short "Yes" came from Christian, subdued but decided. And a little while after, he added—it sounded as though the darkness wrapped his voice in thick, black wool: "If you ever see a pure face that you're fond of made coarse by impure desire, then you're lost."

"And then think of his trying to commit suicide," said Jens.

Christian got up and went over to the lamp. He struck a match, which went out, but Jens saw that the corners of his mouth were drawn down and there was a deep furrow between his eyebrows. Christian struck another match, lit the lamp, and said, without looking at Jens: "I can understand him well enough. More than once I've felt inclined to do like Holger and hang myself on that hook there."

Jens jumped up from his chair.

"My God! Why, you haven't ever——"

"No," said Christian, turning his blazing eyes upon Jens's, "*unfortunately.*"

Jens stared speechlessly at the pale, sallow face under the lamp, the light of which fell upon the deep, dark lines under the eyes. But at last he managed to say:

"I don't understand—I don't understand a word——"

"No," answered Christian, "because you're only a kid. And you may be glad of that."

XIII. Cursed Town

A FEW years were drowned in syntax and dictionaries. One day, when Jens looked out upon life through the tailor's window and into Helen Strömstad's garden, he noticed that Helen was now wearing long skirts. He mentioned his discovery to Christian Barnes, who looked him up and down with a sidelong glance, full of the elder boy's contempt.

"She's sixteen," he said. Christian himself was seventeen.

Helen passed close to them, but she was full of her own thoughts and did not see them.

"What a fine light there is in her eyes!" said Jens. "It must be eyes like hers they call 'dreamy.'"

"Good thing for Helen that she dreams and doesn't look about her home with waking eyes," said Christian. "I'd like to know what she's dreaming about. Somebody will find it out some day. Cursed town!"

"Then you don't know what it is," said Jens, "though you generally know so much about people's thoughts"—in the closed world, he was about to say, but preserved his secret in time.

"No," said Christian, "I don't know that, but I know that if I was an unbeliever, the sight of eyes like those would give me back my faith in an immortal soul."

"Can you imagine being an unbeliever?" asked Jens.

"I can imagine having the choice between unbelief and the belief that everybody is going to hell," said Christian. "Cursed town! And cursed pigsty of a country!"

With that he went off. Jens guessed that Christian Barnes was unhappy, and thought it so interesting that he was within an ace of envying him.

The same afternoon the Consul went into Bjerg's office, bought a lottery ticket, and began to talk as if Bjerg was legally married to Miss Hansen and stepfather to Helen.

In the evening Bjerg went to Miss Hansen's and advised her to decline an offer of a post for Helen in the Consul's office.

But the offer was an uncommonly handsome one, Miss Hansen remarked.

"Yes, but the Consul is a widower and has had young women in his office before," said Bjerg.

"I will speak to the Consul myself before deciding," said Miss Hansen.

Next day she spoke to the Consul, and the day after Helen was in the office.

A month later Christian Barnes had an altercation in the park with the Consul's son, after which they were no longer on speaking terms; but one day, as Helen was leaving the office, Barnes crossed the square, stopped her midway between Frederik VII and sail-maker Berg, and told her she ought to be careful of the people she mixed with. Helen looked at him with wonder in her handsome eyes and asked why. Christian dropped his eyes to the pavement, said "I beg your pardon," and went as abruptly as he had come. Helen gazed after him in astonishment, and then suddenly burst out laughing. Sail-maker Berg, who always stood outside his door, immovable as the statue of Frederik VII except that now and then he blinked his eyes and once in a while he spat, opened his mouth at that moment and shot a long brown stream out over the pavement. Christian, already bowed down by his confusion, got it right in the ear.

Helen only stayed six months at the office. One evening after hours the Consul's son gave his father a black eye in the inner office and got engaged to Henel in the outer. The Consul opposed the match, Helen wept, but her mother went to see the Consul one evening, came home late, but was rewarded by his consent.

After that Helen took a course in housekeeping, and Bjerg the lottery collector began to tipple in secret.

Christian Barnes came to school every morning with his lessons totally unprepared, and at the end of the month the head master called him up and told him he had no chance of matriculating that summer.

From that day neither Jens nor anyone else saw Christian outside the school, but when the examination came off, he passed with honours.

When he left for Copenhagen University, Helen came back from her training-school.

XIV. Intuition

PASTOR BARNES stood watching his son as he reached out to take a hymn-book from the shelf. That movement of the arm he had from his mother—and the way he turned over the pages with his head a little on one side was hers too. Pastor Barnes's eyes widened with an inner light. Now he had the boy at home for the summer vacation. A student! His years at the University, his own youth, and his wife, whom the boy resembled, were all present in the young man before him.

Christian turned, and Pastor Barnes dropped his eyes in confusion and pretended to be looking for his spectacles. Christian looked at his father attentively and wondered whether he had really shrunk, or whether it was only his imagination because he himself had grown.

A strange life, thought Christian, sitting out here in the country by oneself and preaching a sermon every Sunday. In reality life had left the old man behind, he sat by the roadside like a tired soldier, forgotten by the advancing army.

Pastor Barnes looked up from the table, and Christian turned his eyes away and tried to find something friendly and interesting to say, but without succeeding.

The silence was beginning to be oppressive; then Pastor Barnes suddenly drew himself up and said with an effort at a free-and-easy smile: "Shall we go for a walk?" And Christian answered with superlative consideration: "Yes."

They were to go from the parsonage up to the church.

They walked together, but would both have been better pleased to go alone, partly because in that case each would have liked the other to be with him.

"I miss your mother," said Pastor Barnes.

"Yes," answered Christian. His tone showed such ready comprehension that Pastor Barnes decided to keep what he wanted to say for another opportunity, when there was more time. He was so anxious that they should really understand each other,

but there seemed to be too much effort on both sides. In a way he would rather his son did not go to church and listen to him. For he preached badly, and he knew it. That is to say, of course, he preached badly in the opinion of a student like his son. He knew very well that people said: "Barnes is not the man he was." But they did not know that this was because he did not *wish* to be so. They no longer admired him, but in their hearts they probably liked him better. Just as they liked one another. And with a touch of pity, because he had gone off. Well, he could bear it, no doubt; but he was vexed with a desire to show off before his son. For if Pastor Barnes liked he could still preach one of those sermons which used to make people drive a long way to hear him. He was constantly tempted to do this, just once, so that his son might hear it and he might read just once in his eyes what he used to see in those of the whole congregation—profound admiration for the talented preacher. Afterwards he would say to him: "You see, my son, that is how I used to preach before, but I do so no longer, and I will tell you why." But he could not yield to the temptation, the horror of winged words lay too deep in him. He could no longer bring himself to use stronger words and finer phrases than his personality could support. Therefore his language was poor and plain; and he was lonely, because nobody knew he did it on purpose. But he saw that his son had talent, he was very loath to be looked down on by him, and it was too much to ask that so young a man should distinguish between what a person really is and is entitled to utter, and the adornments which he rejects from a sense of humility. But his craving to be understood by his son was deep and heartfelt.

He was understood in part, but never knew it, though Christian honestly wanted to tell him. It was precisely his sense of his father's upright character which made him shy, because his own had a flaw he was ashamed of and dared not mention. He might now and then forget it and feel relieved, but never when he was with his father, whose first commandment to himself was, never to seem better than his real nature.

Thus they walked together over the old playground, each in his own silence, trying to find the simple note which is essential for confidential communication between honest men. Each in his own way was disappointed, and each blamed his own poverty of spirit.

Jens Dahl, now in the top form at the grammar school, was in church, drowsing over Pastor Barnes's sermon, till he suddenly started on hearing: "I publish the banns of marriage between Niels Peter Clausen, bachelor, and Martine Sofie Petersen, spinster."

Already! So a boy at the grammar school was still nothing but a schoolboy. All the others were a long way ahead of him. If only he were even a student!

Outside the church Christian came up to him and started to pump him about the school and the masters.

When the pastor had taken leave of his congregation he stopped before the two young men.

"Are you coming home with me," he asked his son, "or——?"

"I thought of taking a little walk with Jens," Christian answered.

Pastor Barnes gave a nod and a smile.

"I understand," he said, and walked slowly across the playground.

Jens was scanning Christian's face.

"Are you feeling down?" he asked. "You don't seem quite in holiday humor."

"Oh," said Christian, "well—the trouble is, Father's taken it into his head that his company bores me. I'm sorry about it, and it isn't true either. You know, you once said something about its being a bad thing to grow up. Well, I think one can bear it, all the same. But as to getting old, that must be disgusting."

They strolled down the road without saying much, but by degrees Christian's face recovered its old look. He stopped by the garden hedge.

"Your 'chair' is still there," he said.

"Yes," answered Jens, "it's there, and I often sit there still and wonder what little girl it could have been I was always waiting for."

Pretty Tine came past and nodded to them. Her eyes dwelt for a moment on Barnes's student's cap.

When she took them away, they drew Jens's after them a long way down the road.

He had a feeling that a strange softness had come into the air, and it warmed his cheeks.

The long, dark lashes gave her eyes a wonderful lustre.

"I never thought of that before," he said.

"What?" asked Christian.

"That eyes were not only made to see with, but to see into."

Christian sniggered, but Jens did not hear him; he was taken up with Tine's walk.

"Can you dance?" he asked suddenly.

"Why?"

"Well—because—it struck me that dancing must have arisen from——"

In his effort to explain himself he turned to Christian and encountered a pair of narrowed eyes, divined a quiet laugh behind the crooked smile, and turned red as fire, for it convinced him that his own eyes held a photograph, visible to all, of a curved mouth, two round cheeks, two firm breasts, and two supple hips.

Then Barnes laughed aloud and Jens blushed yet deeper, but Christian said reassuringly:

"Well, what's the fuss about? She is really pretty and she has a good figure."

Jens saw no escape from his bashful confusion but open frankness.

"It's because I've never noticed it before," he said. "Well, of course I've known there was a difference between women and ourselves. But it was always something inward—and then their clothes and their work—I have never seen them in themselves."

"By seeing them in themselves you evidently mean seeing them quite carnally," said Barnes.

Jens blushed again and laughed awkwardly.

"I admit it came over me like a revelation—of another world. My goodness!" he cried in forced animation. "What a queer thing it must have been for Adam to wake up suddenly and see Eve standing there."

"Dressed in the fashion of the day," added Barnes in the same tone, but he changed at once to seriousness, as he laid a hand on Jens's shoulder and said quietly:

"You are a lucky fellow, Dahl, to have been able to sleep so long."

Jens looked at him in surprise. He did not feel at all lucky—if anything, a cripple like Henriksen the tailor. Grown up inside and a boy outside.

Suddenly he heard Barnes call out: "Congratulations!"

It was Niels Peter and Martine, coming along at a dignified pace.

"So you're in for it now," said Barnes.

"Yes," said Niels Peter, taking off his hat, "we've all got to do it."

"Yes, everybody's getting married," said Jens to Barnes. "Young as she is, Helen Strömstad was married to the Consul's son this spring."

Barnes looked as if he had not heard, but his voice was husky when he remarked rather hurriedly that pretty Tine was still not engaged.

"Ah, Tine!" said Niels Peter.

"Well, Tine?" repeated Barnes. "She's pretty enough, I should say."

"Ah, pretty," replied Niels Peter. "My word!"

But Martine remarked, with the wisdom of a prophetess:

"It's my opinion that Tine will be an old maid."

"Isn't there anybody who wants her?" asked Barnes.

"Oh, they all *want* her—even this one here," said Martine, giving Niels Peter's arm a pinch.

"Ow!" said Niels Peter. "That's a lie!"

"Well, if it is, it's only because I told you beforehand that it wasn't any use," asserted Martine.

"And yet Niels Peter's a good-looking fellow," Barnes said.

"There are plenty of them in the parish," said Martine, "but it isn't any good. Tine was born in May, and the fortune-book says that those who were born in May carry a longing within them."

"So Tine carries a longing within her," said Barnes. "What does she long for?"

"A manor," replied Martine. "You ought to see her room, it's as tidy and smart as a lady's parlour. It's in her blood. I don't know how it is, but she can mess about with the same dirty work as the rest of us and yet keep as clean and white as a school-teacher. Look here"—she took Niels Peter's hands—"look at his fists, they're hardened with the pitchfork and the muck-rake and it's all you can do to get the black out of his nails. No claws like those are going to get hold of Tine. And they know it too, all of them, for there's never a one that dares to take any liberties with her, when they're sober—not in broad daylight, whatever they may have in their thoughts. No, Tine was born in

May and she carries a longing within her. She's to marry a gentleman, or a schoolmaster at least, who *can* keep his nails clean.—Well, I dare say a schoolmaster's son would do," she laughed at Jens, "but he would have to be a bit older and not go red when you talk about it. All the same," she added seriously, to give Jens a chance of recovering his natural colour, "all the same I'm sorry for Tine, because she's one of the last that's fitted to be an old maid. It's a hard thing to have a fire blazing inside you, if you haven't anything to put on it. And there's a fire blazing in Tine."

"Talk about putting something on the fire," remarked Niels Peter, "that reminds me that we're to go home to Mother's and eat pancakes."

"That's right," said Martine; "it's the same with pancakes as with love; you've got to take them while they're warm."

"Yes," said Barnes when they had gone, "they're going home to his mother's pancakes and I must go home to my father's salt fish."

He went over to the parsonage, and Jens went in to the parish clerk's hash.

In the afternoon he sat in his "chair" in the hedge and saw Hans Olsen and Ellen Nielsen walk past together. Though they were now grown up, their faces seemed to him to be just the same as when they were going to school. It gave him a deep peace to look at them; and he could do so without disturbing them, they had not noticed he was there. They walked in silence side by side. When they reached the schoolyard Hans Olsen awoke from his thoughts and said:

"To-day the banns were put up for Niels Peter and Martine."

"Yes, they were," Ellen answered in her friendly voice.

"There's the school," said Hans Olsen, and stood still.

"Yes, there it is," said Ellen.

They both stood still and their thoughts went back.

"Do you remember," Hans began, "one day in the first class when we looked at each other in the writing-lesson and both began to grin? You can't remember that, can you?"

"I remember it well," said Ellen.

"As far as I'm concerned," said Hans, "it's been like that with me ever since—you don't say anything?"

"What should I say?" said Ellen. "I've known it well enough."

Hans looked at her and seemed much surprised.

"How long have you known it?"

"I've known it since the day we buried Hansine," said Ellen, "and you began to cry and took my hand."

"You cried too that day," said Hans.

"It's always been like that with me," said Ellen. "I wanted to laugh when you laughed and to cry when you cried."

Hans considered for a moment.

"Don't you think it might go on being like that, Ellen?" he asked at last.

"I'm sure it can never be any other way, as it's been like that always," said Ellen.

"Well, but then——" said Hans.

"Yes," said Ellen.

"Then it *is* like that," said Hans.

Then they took each other's arms and walked past the school.

"It was in there," said Hans.

"In there it was," said Ellen.

They went a long way up the road side by side.

All at once they both stopped, turned to each other, smiled, and gave each other a kiss.

They stood still, the eyes of each resting upon the other's mouth.

Then Hans took her arm again and they walked a long way on.

Suddenly Hans said:

"Why, when you come to think of it, Ellen, we might have been like this all the time since we were children."

"We *have* been like this," said Ellen gently.

"So we have," said Hans. "So we have really." He looked at her and pressed his arm against hers. "But now we're grown up," he said.

Ellen nodded and dropped her eyes to the good old grey dust of the road.

Jens Dahl sat a long while in the hedge looking out upon the familiar fields and farms. Here and there people came out to look at the crops; he could see the smoke of the men's pipes but could not hear their voices. He felt lonely, but could not bring himself to go anywhere. A sudden gladness came over him when he heard voices down the road without being able to distinguish the words. He shut his eyes and hoped they would stay there a long time talking.

But they came nearer, and a few words leapt to his ear with a key to the meaning of the buzz of voices.

It was Annine Clausen and Kirsten Per Smeds, trotting along and gossiping. They caught sight of him and stopped, having the whole Sunday afternoon before them, but felt a kind of awkwardness when they remembered that properly speaking he was no longer one of themselves, now that he was going to be a student. They couldn't quite make up their minds whether to stop and say a few words or go straight on with a surprised "Good day," as though it was not he at all that had caught their attention.

It must have been this sudden embarrassment of theirs that suddenly revealed to him that they had once been a pair of nice-looking young girls, who dropped their eyes bashfully before the bold glances of men. He saw their youth as clearly as one finds the original colour in the folds of an old faded garment. It took him so much by surprise that he could not restrain himself, but continued to scan the lines of their faces and figures, and he was astonished to find pleasure in it.

Annine looked from him to Kirsten, and Kirsten looked from him to Annine, whereupon, as though by agreement, they both looked at him with a smile which made him blush and feel foolish.

They nodded and went on. There was a kind of chuckling in their backs, but suddenly it stopped.

"Ah—they're all growing up around us," said Kirsten, drawing a breath that was something like a sigh.

"Aye, life's a funny thing," replied Annine.

"Two women," said Jens to himself, as though quoting from a book.

All at once he turned in astonishment and looked at Kirsten's broad working-woman's back and Annine's more active one.

Why, they were the mothers of Kristian Mogensen and Niels Peter!

He had known them all his life, and they had never been anything else than Niels Peter's or Kristian Mogensen's mother. Only as such had he seen them—just as he only knew that side of the moon which is turned towards the earth. But now he had suddenly come round to the side that looked towards young Per the smith and the vanished father of Niels Peter.

The father of Niels Peter! Why, yes, for it was not only

Niels Peter that had Annine for his mother: there was also Annine who had had a child. Had it against her will, because she had "lost her wits for five minutes one cattle-show evening." And Hansine, the joiner's little Hansine, who grew up and let the miller's man from Vissingrød seduce her. And Holger Enke, in whom there was no evil, but who nevertheless "went and turned criminal and murderer." And Christian Barnes, who was unhappy because he "knew too much about the grown-ups."

Yes, as Christian had said, he had been "a kid" and been glad of it. For him existence began with a father and a mother, which everybody had. Now he was extending his borders, and what he saw on the other side of the fence was not pretty. Nobody had children because they wanted to be parents, but because they "lost their wits for five minutes."

Impulse, impulse, nothing else. He felt it already in himself, blushed for it and dreaded it.

Hansine and Holger. They were both better than he. And yet . . . And Christian Barnes, who had done nothing and yet had thought of suicide! He didn't understand that, but he understood Holger Enke.

He strolled about restlessly and crossed the playground. There stood the church, the house of God, where Hansine and Holger had renounced the devil. Over in the corner stood the elder-tree.

The elder, what was the matter with it? Was it something strange in the light, or was there really an expression in its foliage, as in a face that smilingly awaits recognition?

Lillebror! Lillebror, who once rose like a bubble from the depths of his own eyes bringing news of where we came from.

He gazed at the elder, which still awaited recognition.

Ah, yes, it was you that stood open and received me and Lillebror into the open.

The open! It was long since he had really lived in it. His lessons had insensibly drawn him into the world where one acquires learning and experience bit by bit. But a gleam from the world of the language of heaven had nevertheless brightened his days.

But was it real? Was it not merely a thing of his own imagination?

He gazed at the elder.

Yes, he could see that it stood open.

If he could only be assured that this was real!

It seemed to him that his soul's salvation depended on it.

He looked at the elder, and he remembered Lillebror's fathomless eyes, when they opened for the first time. All other memories paled in comparison with this. They faded, shrivelled up.

He remembered this bottomless depth in his brother's eyes, and how they had, as it were, *touched* his own and opened them wide.

The memory was as strong as a renewed experience. It happened. He felt as if Lillebror's eyes lay in his and made them happy.

He could not resist the feeling, but let it spread within him.

It penetrated his soul as a gentle contact. He opened to receive it.

He did not positively believe in it, but he yielded to the feeling that Lillebror was in the open, and that he could meet him there.

An inner gladness drew him on; as though with physical force, it drew him on to the elder.

He did not believe in it, but still he could not resist the feeling that Lillebror was leading him into the open, as he so many times had taken the little one by the hand and led him about in the closed world.

When he stood under the elder he was in the open, set free from his doubt.

In deep peace and unfailing certainty he looked out from the open into the closed world and saw, as a simple observation, the relation between movement and rest.

In this lay the difference between the open and the closed.

A great movement went through the world, a mighty moving force issued from the open and penetrated all things, setting all in motion.

This force was the same everywhere and yet constantly changing; now it was sluggish and dull, now violent and wild, now calm and gentle.

All living things floated upon its restless stream.

And not only they, but the things that were called lifeless, motionless. It penetrated everything, stones and metals, giving them life and movement; nothing was dead.

He saw it in the world of plants and of animals, where its changes were more rapid.

It was like looking on at the creation of the world. It took place before his eyes.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. But we are still in the beginning.

He saw the living force in the world of men, and there it was complete, uniting that from the "dead" world and from the plants and the animals, and yet another, the gentle breath that came straight from the open.

This moving force carried men along with it to action. They took it for their own will and called the acts theirs.

But when the moving force had driven them farther on, it might be that they looked back and disowned their own deeds, taught by painful experience.

Then arose the conception of free will; they began to choose and reject. They began to distinguish between the impersonal force and themselves. A character appeared. God had created a man.

This happened in the beginning, but we are still in the beginning.

But within the open is an everlasting Now, which is without beginning or end.

There is the "seventh day," when God rests, after a man's character has been formed.

There he must be sought by the man who desires to follow him, while still fighting independently for the formation of his character.

For that is why we are in the stream, the stream of impersonal forces—in order that we may learn to distinguish between ourselves and it, and become characters.

Characters, which then devote themselves in love to God.

He went home in a deep peace.

XV. Time

DURING the whole of the next day his mind still dwelt in a deep calm, where time and eternity were merged together. He had not, so to speak, come out of the elder. Memory and observation coincided.

Not till Tuesday morning did he begin to *think* over his experience, and he was amazed. For men did not know what they themselves were. Those who were surest of themselves were just the blindest of all. Everybody he saw lived entirely in the closed world, without a suspicion of what in the innermost sense was "themselves."

His father, his mother, Annine Clausen—all were in the power of their nature. They glided down the stream and their speed was determined by the strength of the current and their own gravity. Not only did they know nothing of the open, but it had no influence on them. They were never still. The stream carried them on.

He could see into them, and he saw that they did not know how near their own happiness was to them.

But one was different from the rest. That was Pastor Barnes. There was something about this quiet man which made him, as it were, greater in all his humility. He was not in the power of his own nature to the same extent as the others. In some way or other he had freed himself from the stream, though without knowing the open. . . .

The more Jens saw the difference between himself and others, the more intoxicated he became with his intuition. *He* could not let himself be taken in by life's impersonal forces, for he had *seen* them.

He knew only one besides himself who saw into the open. The Professor. But he was old. He himself was young, with his life before him. He was born to see into things. He was chosen.

When his father asked one day whether he had any plans for the future, what he would like to be, he said he had not thought of anything definite yet.

The fact was, none of the usual things was big enough. It would have been quite natural to him to answer that he wanted to be a genius.

He walked in a triumphant security in the face of life: nothing could take him in. He had raised his eyes above the present and looked into the future.

His deep calm passed imperceptibly into proud, impatient expectation.

On Sunday evening he was strolling along the road. The moon was early up, and the whole landscape seemed bewitched in its yellowish light. It would be one of those nights that tempt one to think that the moon gives more light than the sun.

He walked across a field in full moonlight. Above the slope lay the Hill Farm with a look of faery about it.

He could not take his eyes off it: its gables and walls drew him on. Without being conscious of it, he walked on and on towards the farm.

Outside it Tine was standing under a willow, when she saw someone coming across the field in the moonlight. Tine was so fond of taking walks by herself and gazing into the distance.

Jens did not see her until he jumped over the stone fence.

"Why, it's Tine," he said.

"Yes," said Tine. "Good evening."

She looked at him as though she had never seen him before.

"Is it really you?" she said.

"You seem to think I'm a stranger," said he.

"Well, I——" Tine hesitated. "You—you're not really one of us any longer. You see, you're going to be a student."

She was still looking at him in surprise.

"That needn't make any difference," said he.

"All right, then," said Tine, but could not take her eyes from his face.

She said no more, and he chuckled at the idea of Tine looking up to him as one older than herself.

There came a sound of singing and bawling from down the road. Tine gave a start.

"There they are again!" she said.

"Who?" asked Jens.

"The farm-hands," she said. "They were after me before, and now they've been to the inn. I daren't stop here. If they

weren't drunk I could make them keep their distance. If only I can get in!"

"I'll go with you," said Jens; "then they'll have to behave."

They went towards Hill Farm. The men, who had suddenly stopped their noise, disappeared behind one of the buildings. Tine stopped in alarm.

"They've gone into my room," she said. "I'll go into the parlour and fetch the farmer."

At that moment the men appeared from behind the cowshed.

"There she is," they cried. "There's somebody with her! We'll give him a dusting."

"Come on," whispered Tine, "there are four of them." She took his arm and started to run.

The men came after them cursing.

"We shan't reach it," whispered Tine. "Come here into the barn, it's dark. They're too drunk to find us."

They slipped into the barn, but heard the men shouting outside: "We've seen you!" They shook at the door.

"Here," whispered Tine. "Into the hay."

They crept up and sat still in the darkness.

"They're in the hay," the men shouted. "Come down, or we'll be after you and break your necks!"

A couple of them tried to get up, but rolled down again. "It's the drink," they said with an oath. "We'll get you all right!" they cried. "We'll wait for you outside."

There was nothing for it but to wait till the drunken men lost patience and took themselves off.

Jens was wondering whether he would be locked out at home. They would think he had gone to bed. Perhaps he could get in through a window. Otherwise he would have to wake his parents. At any rate he had a good excuse for being late. What might not have happened to Tine! Tine! He couldn't see her, but he could hear her breathing. Funny to be sitting so close to one another and not be able to see. He put out his hand to touch her, but hurriedly withdrew it, because at that moment he remembered her. Remembered her as he had seen her the Sunday before, when she passed by him and Christian Barnes.

"I'd like to know if I couldn't manage those four fellows," he said. "They're drunk enough."

"No," said Tine, clutching him. "They'll all set on you at

once. Especially after we've been in here alone," she added, as she slowly withdrew her hand.

"Well, then there's nothing for it but to wait patiently," said Jens, leaning back in the hay.

"What a strong scent it has," he said.

"It makes some people ill, doesn't it?" said Tine. Her voice was cautious and hushed in the darkness.

"I think I'd be more likely to get drunk on it," said Jens.

"You would never go and get drunk, would you?" said Tine, and there was something in her tone which made his heart beat with joy.

He lay smiling into the darkness. The soft darkness. Images began to form in it. Clear images of a face, never a whole one, but now a mouth, now a cheek, now a pair of eyes with long black lashes.

He was not thinking of Tine at all. He knew well enough that, like himself, she was lying there waiting to get out, but he didn't want to talk; he was looking at these images which made the darkness alive and the air soft and mild. "Darkness ought to be feminine," he thought. "What is it in French?—or German?—it is soft and unfathomable like a woman." He reached out his arms to it as though to embrace it.

In the darkness an embrace opened to receive him. He sank into it, intoxicated, scarcely knowing whether it was real or only a dream. It was no definite person he took in his arms; he immersed his whole being deep in this feminine darkness. . . .

He lay still with her hand in his.

"Dear," she said, and went on repeating: "Dear—dear—dear."

It was Tine! Tine, whom he had seen last Sunday. In a new and violent desire he turned to possess himself of all that had been revealed to him as she walked past him and Christian Barnes.

And as she gave him all he desired, he felt that it was Tine, Tine of the churchyard path, Tine of the confirmation, Tine of the school, and he was convinced that he had loved her from the first day he saw her, and would love her all his life.

They were outside in the moonlight and the time had come to say good-bye. Tine's face was not so happy as her voice had been in the darkness, when she whispered: "Dear—dear." Her eyes, with their long lashes, turned dark and deep in the

moonlight; her mouth had a touch of gentle, saddened happiness. She was even prettier than in the morning. He seized her hand and would have drawn back into the dark. But Tine, who never took her serious eyes from his young face, pushed him gently away and whispered softly, as though in remorse: "No! No!"

He tried to kiss her; she avoided it, but suddenly threw her arms tightly about his neck and kissed him to dizziness. He caught at her, but she shook her head.

"Go now," she said. "Your father and mother don't know where you are."

"What of it?" he answered bluntly, but felt like a boy, and was irritated with her for making him feel so.

"We can sit on the fence for a bit," he said, but she only shook her head and looked at him. The distance between them widened, although they were standing on the same spot and he felt that all her thoughts were with him. He guessed with a bitter feeling that she would not have stood like this if he had been of the same age as she. She would not have looked at Niels Peter or Kristian Mogensen in this way. But then, to be sure, she would never have——

"Well, all right," he gave in. "Good night, then."

"Good night," said Tine in a dull voice.

The door was locked when he got home. He broke into a sweat with fear, but found a window open.

Like a thief he crept into his own home and stole up to his room. It came off! He slipped into bed with a chuckle. The old people were sound asleep and suspected nothing.

XVI. Closed

NEXT day he went three times as far as the gate of the parsonage, for he wanted to talk to Christian and manage it so that in the course of conversation he would have to tell him his experience. Each time he turned back, remembering the distance Tine's look had placed between them in the moonlight. No, he was not a boy who blabbed about everything. Perhaps that was what she was afraid of. He would let her see and acknowledge him as an equal.

It would be best not to be in too much of a hurry to run after her again. He would have to take it lightly and as a matter of course.

But he thought of nothing else, and it was hard work waiting the two days that *were* to go by before he looked her up. He was loafing about in the garden, and his mother came up to him.

"You're so restless," she said.

He put her off with a careless "Am I?"

She looked him up and down and began to smile, a smile that showed both gladness and anxiety.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked.

She looked him up and down once more and said:

"Why, you'll soon be grown up now."

"M—yes," he said, drawing himself up, but unable to avoid a blush.

"Well, well," she said, "you all leave us behind; it's the way of the world."

He went on to the road and glanced across to Hill Farm. He felt rather more courageous about going over there. Martine came along. He felt inclined to talk to her, now that she and the rest of the girls were no longer a mystery to him.

"What are you gadding about for in working-hours?" he said.

"I've got a day off," answered Martine. As she spoke, a little clucking laugh shook her. She looked up, as though surprised at herself, and scanned him a moment. Then she gave another little laugh, but different, at the same time more candid and more guarded.

"If you look at me like that," she said, "I shall tell Niels Peter. —Let's see, how old are you?"

"Seventeen," he said.

"Ah—well," said Martine, "then I can give you a piece of advice. Don't you go getting the girls into trouble when you're a year or two older, my boy."

"What do you mean by that?" he said, looking her straight in the face with a smile.

She retreated a step.

"I mean that if you chose you might be just as dangerous to have going about as the Vissingröd miller's man—Lord knows where he is now and what his conscience says!—Well, I must be getting home."

He looked after her in amazement. The Vissingröd miller's man! The way she had said it! How often had he heard the men declare it was a shame Holger Enke couldn't manage to kill the miller, since he was in for doing a murder and getting into jail. But what about the girls who suffered for it? There was no condemnation in Martine's voice when she mentioned him, but there was certainly pity when she talked about his conscience. And it was anything but a reproach, scarcely even a warning, when she said that Jens might be just as dangerous to have at large. Even in Martine's clear eyes, which always saw to the end of a thing and never showed any confusion, there had been a brief gleam of pleasure, which she contrived to extinguish at once. In the strange sinking look of her eyes he had seen the view all women took of the Vissingröd miller, the male with irresistible desire. Their conscience condemned his actions, but their flesh approved them, and their hearts forgave the man himself. Martine's warning amounted to a tribute which caused his chest to swell in a short, triumphant laughter and filled him with the desire of seeing that helplessly sinking look in the eyes of the girls. Tine disappeared, transposed herself, as it were, into them all; every woman became Tine.

But because she was the prettiest, Tine was again every woman in one, and in the evening he went to Hill Farm.

He did not see her. A lot of men were sitting on the stone fence chatting. He turned back, lest they might think he was hanging about after Tine. He dared not go over there again for fear of arousing suspicion. The days grew insufferably long, but at last the idea of church consoled him. She would certainly

come to church next Sunday. Then, at any rate, he would see her and there might be a chance of talking to her.

But that Sunday the service was in the afternoon; the bells did not ring before two o'clock.

It was his mother's birthday. Unfortunately he had forgotten to buy her a little present. It was the first time that had happened. Oh, well, he could go to town next day and make up for it by buying something better. What was the time? Half past one. Half an hour yet! Suppose she didn't come. Perhaps she couldn't, perhaps she wouldn't! Before him was a big peony bush, swelling with its luxuriant green and its blazing red flowers. A dizziness came over him; he bent over the bush, thrust his hands into its rank mass, tore off the stalks, bit into the red flowers, and looked about for more to strip to pieces. . . .

There was his mother at the end of the path, slowly coming nearer. He looked for somewhere to hide, but was incapable of movement; he felt paralysed and naked, and thought the most secret recesses of his mind were exposed to the light of day. It did not occur to him that she could have no idea of the cause of his outrage on the peonies. He had to find an explanation before she reached him. He had only one desire, that of deceiving her.

His head hurt him; she *should* not reach the bush before he was ready with an explanation. All at once she seemed to be standing still. A shadow fell upon her face and an obscurity, as of an eclipse, came over the trees of the garden. Their leaves had a dead look, as though they were made of paper and painted. The bushes were the same, everything was sham.

He stooped down quickly and picked up the broken peonies, which looked artificial like everything else. He hurriedly arranged them into a bouquet. Something within him said—and it seemed to shout loud enough for him to hear: "Stop! Don't do it!"

But he did it all the same. He went to meet his mother and handed her the flowers with a bow of exaggerated politeness.

He saw that she received them with a smile of naïve pride at the nice manners of her schoolboy son. He found her narrow, and a grin of pitiless mockery flew to his lips, while at the same time he turned pale, for a voice within him pronounced sentence: "Now lying has come into the world."

He followed his mother with his eyes, as she went in to put

the flowers in water. What was the time? He ought to go in and brush his hair and wash his hands, it was just church-time.

In the doorway he met his father in black coat and with hymn-book in hand, going solemnly to church. He looked at his fat back and insignificant neck.

"Idiot!" he said under his breath, and started at himself. "What the devil's the matter with me? I must be nervous."

His hands shook as he was brushing his hair.

"Where are you going?" his mother asked as he was running to the door.

"To church!" His tone was snappish.

"You've no hymn-book."

"Damn!" He rushed back for it. As he reached the road he saw a woman disappear through the churchyard gate. Wasn't it Tine? If he hadn't forgotten that blasted hymn-book he might have caught her up. He started to run across the playground. There, curse it, his hat blew off into the elder. He fell in reaching for it, and as he was dusting his trousers his eyes fell on the elder, which had caught the hat.

What was it? Where was he? There was the churchyard wall, and there was Jakob Hansen's farm. And there was the elder. Yes, that was it. But how the deuce could he imagine it was another one? Still the same! He stared at it, as though he had never seen it before. Rot! This branch and this, and the crooked one there—it was himself that was off his head to-day. But the smile that was forming on his lips stiffened and died, for he heard himself say, in a voice which he thought was Lillebror's:

"It is closed."

There he stood open-eyed with his hat in one hand and his hymn-book in the other. Before him stood an unconcerned elder-tree. It grew against the churchyard wall, and he had an inexplicably heavy, dead feeling that it stood over a grave, and that he himself lay buried beneath it. He gasped for breath. In some way or other a sentence had been pronounced on him, without his knowing why.

"It is closed."—Well, how was it? Wasn't there something about its standing open?

As he gazed inquiringly at the elder it seemed to him to open and shut again in a strangely lifeless manner, like a face making a grimace. Then it became just an ordinary elder.

He walked round the pitilessly closed elder and seated himself on the old see-saw.

His thoughts tried to find Lillebror. Hadn't he come to his help only the other day?—Here they had played together—and Jakob Hansen's dog didn't dare to bite them because of the language of heaven—but Christian Barnes had learnt German and French and didn't know the language of heaven—and now he himself knew two dead and three living languages—but the language of heaven was a miracle, and Jakob Hansen's servant-girl was converted and had a miscarriage.—He laughed.

It was hard to keep his thoughts quiet. He tried again—*non cuivis homini contigit adire Corinthum*—the black student's cap was smarter than the white—for next summer—if only Livy and Herodotus——

No—quiet, quiet. Banish all thoughts. So, yes, so; then it would come back—*reviendrait—revenir*—rot! that's the perfect——

It was no good. Every time he came near the open, some trifling thought would be sticking in the keyhole. He struggled with it in vain, till at last he got up, tired out. He had a headache.

But the air was gloriously fresh. There lay Jakob Hansen's garden, tree after tree in riotous luxuriance. Red fruit gleaming a thousandfold in the sunlight. Juicy and sweet. Good to eat.

He filled his lungs with air and stretched out his arms in a longing for something to take hold of, and nodded in satisfaction. Road and garden and fields had a new look, like a country he had never seen before, and he heard himself saying:

"This is the earth."

That was where he had met Martine. What was it she had said?—she *did* flinch a little from his eyes.

Tine!

He would wait in the hazel hedge and see her come out of church. But first he went in to look at himself in the glass.

There was a smile on his face, and as he looked it grew bigger, for he knew it well. It was the enigmatic smile he had so often seen in Niels Peter and Kristian and Holger—but now he had it just as knowing as theirs.

He nodded at the glass:

"This is me."

XVII. A Tailor's Tragedy

TINE had not been to church that day.

He returned to town without having met her. While within reach of her and among the men who admired, without venturing to desire her, he was shy and afraid of gossip.

But once in the town, he behaved with growing assurance in the presence of the women he met, and more than one glance from a girl reminded him of Martine's promising caution about the Vissingröd miller's man.

He grew in his own and others' estimation. Henriksen the tailor began to treat him as a grown-up man and passed from hints and suggestions to downright confidence. He told him he had thoughts of abandoning the state of celibacy.

Dahl looked at his humpback and wondered.

Fortune smiled upon Henriksen and made him kind. He had changed his tactics. He laid aside his scornful mask and greeted Helen's mother with a friendly bow.

The first time she looked at him in surprise and returned a short nod. Next time she looked glad and smiled. At last they got into the habit of stopping and exchanging a few words over the garden fence.

Ordinary neighbours' gossip was out of the question; he could discover no common human interests in her, she was feminine all through. Love was her very being, and love hung about her, as the perfume hangs about a rose. Nobody could come near her without feeling it. Her eyes kindled hope, her smile gave promises, whether she would or no. And when she saw that Henriksen had a handsome face, this could be read in hers.

Henriksen was so intoxicated and paralysed by it that he could not say the decisive words. His tongue was tied by happiness.

But one day it must come. Happiness made him good. His features were smoothed out, the perfunctory look of discontent his socialist convictions had imposed on him as a sign of comradeship, was relaxed like worn elastic, until it vanished altogether. Nay,

his greatest pride, his atheism, which he had always worn before the world like a tall hat, a mark of consideration, was no longer so obvious or so jaunty. It was only made up of newspaper articles and could hardly bear the sunshine of happiness. One day in Dahl's room when he gave his usual triumphal cry: "I'm a freethinker!" his little Mephisto chin-tuft didn't look nearly so devilish as before. . . .

Henriksen sat at his window looking out on the quiet, sunny street. There was a sparrow pecking among the cobble-stones. He opened the window and threw out some crumbs.

One act of kindness leads to another. Over in the square stood old sail-maker Berg, opposite Frederik VII, with his hands in his pockets, blinking his eyes from time to time.

Old Berg! Nobody ever talked to him. But he would stop and have a chat as he passed. Berg should be made to feel that he too was alive.

A lady passed by with a hat like Helen's. Ah, Helen, for all she was Mrs. Urup and daughter-in-law of a man like the Consul, there was a stain on her pedigree. That stain he would wash away. He would rehabilitate her—he spoke the word aloud, it sounded fine—she should know the time when she could talk freely of "her parents."

Yes, he would be father-in-law to the Consul's son—he had a vision of his mother's face, as clear as if she had stood before him in the flesh. Ah, how delighted she would have been! He could hear her say: "My son's son-in-law, young Urup."

For the moment he simply couldn't imagine that she was dead, but only that she was somewhere else. And that was what she herself had believed. She hated all his freethinking ideas. "It's only wicked people who are freethinkers, my boy," she used to say; "the good know that there is a life after death." If she was right, why, then she was alive now and could see him and rejoice in his happiness, and that made him feel good. Was it for that she had almost appeared to him?

And was he sure that she was not right? When he was good it was easier to believe in eternal life than when he was discontented and bitter. Besides, he had seen the difference in his own home. His father was an unbeliever and had hanged himself on a hook in his workshop, after he had lost his money in a bad speculation. But his mother, who was a believer, accepted poverty and faithfully worked herself to death for him. It was jus-

tice if she were alive now and could rejoice at his happiness. And she would be doubly glad if he believed as she did. "Young people are so easily led astray through bad example," she had always said.

Well, at any rate he would not give that. He went to Dahl's room.

"I told you one day," he began, "that I was a freethinker. I fancy that must have made an unpleasant impression on you, so I want to tell you that I ought rather to be described as a believer."

In saying this he felt a comfortable warmth inside, which he had not known since he was a little boy and his mother told him stories. He was so strongly moved by it that he suddenly exclaimed with warm conviction:

"Yes, I *am* a believer."

When he went back to his window he saw Bjerg the lottery collector cross the square, making for the hotel.

Well, the man drank, he knew that.

Henriksen's forehead wrinkled; a struggle was going on within him. It wasn't easy, for he preferred not to speak to Bjerg. But it couldn't be denied that it was in a way Henriksen's fault that the man drank. Because she had broken with him at last.

If he could have spoken to his mother about it she would have said: "Do it, my boy; it does one good to do good!"

After all, it wasn't such a terrible thing to go over to the hotel and try to get Bjerg home sober. He ought to be able to make the fellow understand that he had got to be a man. Look at him, Henriksen himself; he didn't drink while the business with Bjerg was going on. Let's talk about it as man to man. Damn it all—bless me, I mean—if I can put up with what has been, you can surely resign yourself to what is to come. It would be a sort of wedding-present to her. "You have nothing to reproach yourself with; I've dragged the man ashore; he's given up drinking."

The best thing would be if Bjerg would take the pledge, for a while anyhow.

Henriksen took his hat and went out.

In the square he met Helen and her husband. Luck was with him to-day, sure enough. He nodded to them in anticipation of his rôle of papa and father-in-law.

Urup looked back at him askance.

"Hellish familiar that impudent tailor is to-day."

"He's an old neighbour of ours, you know," said Helen apologetically.

"Ha," growled Urup crossly, "it's a damned nuisance"—that you don't belong to a decent family, he would have said, but it was impossible to say that kind of thing when Helen looked at one with such innocent inquiry. Really, she was a bit too angelic. She might have taken a little more after her mother, since she *had* the misfortune to be her daughter!

Henriksen was too happy to go straight to the hotel. He had to take a little turn in the woods first.

Time slipped by under the leafy oaks. When he looked at his watch he exclaimed in surprise: "The devil!"

He had to look at it again to make sure that it was really so late. And then it dawned on him that he must be much happier than he had known. Full of gratitude, he looked up at the blue sky, which showed through the foliage, and said in a resolute tone: "Yes, I *am* a believer."

And now Bjerg was to be fetched home from the hotel.

At this juncture Dahl went across the square and saw that Bjerg was sitting in his usual place in the window of the hotel and that he was perfectly drunk.

He himself crossed over to a wine-room on the other side to become partially so.

This happened now and again, when Sunday was approaching and he felt that once more he would not have the pluck to go over and see Tine.

With the help of three or four glasses of port, he was free of his bonds and saw clearly what he would do, and the last glass almost made it a reality.

If only the seat behind the screen was empty! He didn't want to be seen; it would be bad for him if the head master heard anything.

The "screen" was a ragged remnant of an old partition, which must have been originally put up for the benefit of people who liked to take their drink incognito. There was a big crack in it, so that anyone behind it could keep an eye on the whole room without being seen himself.

The screen and the room were both empty.

But at his second glass some people came in. It was Henriksen and Bjerg.

Bjerg had lost both his wits and his balance; he reeled about

the room and plumped down at the table next the screen. Henriksen stuck to him staunchly.

Bjerg didn't see him until—without ordering it—he had got his toddy. Madsen, the waiter, brought two glasses, and so it was he discovered Henriksen.

“Are you here too?” he grumbled. “Haven't we had enough of your jaw?”

“Why can't we be friends?” said Henriksen.

Bjerg was busy with his toddy and did not respond.

But, a good while after, he suddenly blurted out:

“Friends—men—women—trash!”

Then he laughed, as if he had made a good joke.

“D'I say trash? Hah! That's true 'nough. That's what they are. Every one of them.”

“You're drunk,” said Henriksen.

Bjerg looked at him with the drunken man's heartfelt contempt for idiotic sobriety.

“Drunk—hah!—drunk—snip!”

He got a fit of wisdom and fought with his facial muscles for a profound look.

“Look here—lemme tell you—we men, we do it because we're built that way, but the women, they figure it all out.—Only when there's no chance of being found out—then they're all for it—hide their heads in the sand like the ostrich—don't know anything about it themselves either.”

“You're a fool!” said Henriksen. He was angry. The man might be drunk, but there was a limit.

But Bjerg was possessed of his pitiless wisdom.

“You can see how it was with yourself! As long as you looked—hump and all—as if you were going to spit at her, why—then she was ashamed of herself, just as if you hadn't any hump at all—but just as soon as you pretended there was nothing wrong—why, down goes her head into the sand—she gets the idea that she must be an honest woman—and then she goes and takes on the Consul—the old 'un, I mean.”

Henriksen got up.

“It's a lie! And now——”

Bjerg looked up unmoved at the threatening tailor.

“If it's a lie—then it's a lie that I'm sitting here drunk.—You see the Consul wanted to get Helen—and then the son gave him a

black eye—and then the Consul said: 'I won't have it,' he said—that was the marriage."

"They *are* married," said Henriksen scornfully.

"Yes, you see, she went to the Consul, the old 'un, I mean—she went to him one evening all dressed up for it—low dress—I know her—crossed her legs—lots of calf—and all that—And so they made a match of it—both lots—and I took to drink.—Is it lies, what I'm saying, eh, Madsen?"

"It's what the whole town knows on the quiet," said Madsen.

Bjerg looked up at Henriksen in triumph, like a player declaring a straight flush.

Henricksen was pale as a corpse. He was trying to find a word that would demolish Bjerg and the whole universe.

"Do you know what I am?" he said.

"Yes, you're a snip," said Bjerg with a hiccup.

Henricksen struck the table with his fist.

"I'm a freethinker!"

With that he left the place like a messenger of destruction.

Next morning the charwoman came in to Dahl and told him that Henriksen was dead.

"He hanged himself on the same hook as his father," she said.

"I saw him there when I came in. Luckily the butcher had just stopped outside, so he could cut him down.—He must have been dead in no time," she added consolingly, when she saw Dahl turn pale, stagger, and lean against the table. "You see, his hump kept him off the wall, so the rope pulled tight."

When Bjerg heard that Henriksen was dead he felt like a man who has had an ugly dream which is bound to be a bad omen, but which he can't exactly remember. He went down to the wine-room.

"Madsen," he said confidentially, "wasn't I here with Henriksen last night?"

Yes, Mr. Bjerg had been there.

"What were we doing?"

Madsen, who also knew of Henriksen's death and saw the state of the case, gave a brief and instructive account of their meeting.

Without taking anything and without saying anything, Bjerg went off to the Good Templar Lodge and signed the pledge.

Nor was the third customer of the wine-room feeling very comfortable. Dahl was seized by a fear that the forces which

had made Bjerg a drunkard and Henriksen a suicide might also get command of him.

When Sunday came he went to church before appearing at home, and when his father asked him at dinner-time whether he had begun to think of what study he would take up when he had passed his matriculation, he replied that he wanted to take theology.

His mother gave a happy smile, his father nodded satisfaction and said:

“Then you feel a call to preach the Word.”

Dahl had not got so far as that; he only felt the need of saving his soul.

XVIII. The Night between Friday and Saturday

ONE of his landladies—the “crooked” one—put her shining polypous nose in at the door.

“Ex—cuse me, Mr. Dahl, it—it’s only a l—letter.” Her face was accustomed to wear a snappish and spiteful look, smiles did not become her. She was like a dog that ducks its head, wags its tail, and gets ready to bite you in the leg.

She carefully put the letter on the edge of the table, turned her crooked back, and disappeared, leaving a faint odour of spirits behind her.

He got up and rinsed his mouth for the fiftieth time, for he happened to think of someone who was *not* crooked but, on the contrary, made her living by her shapeliness.

Phew, he couldn’t rinse away the memories of punch, tobacco and other poisonous fumes.

The letter. He hardly liked to take it, because the crooked one had touched it with her eternally unwashed hands and black-edged nails.

He thought he had seen the writing before, but could not remember where. It was almost a copy-book hand. Yes, of course—his father had written like that; it had gradually become rather senile, but had always had something of the writing-master about it. He looked at the postmark.

The letter was from home. His heart suddenly began to thump with fear. Annoyed at his silly nervousness, he forced his heart to cease throbbing before opening the letter, but his fingers still trembled as he tore the envelope.

“Bakkeböl School, June 7th.

“Mr. Jens Dahl, student of theology.

“It has fallen to my mournful lot to inform you that your dear mother is no longer among the ranks of the living. The steadfast, self-sacrificing care with which she nursed your deceased father in his latter days exceeded her powers, and she was no longer the hale,

strong woman she wished to appear in her letters to you. She was so afraid that anxiety for her health might hinder you in your work. We, who saw her day by day, were well aware that the end was not far off, and yet we had hoped that she would have survived the summer, as she herself believed, looking forward to having you home in the vacation and, as she said, spending the last days of her life with you.—It was not to be. God called her to Himself on the night between Friday and Saturday, at three o'clock. Calmly and peacefully she fell asleep in the name of the Lord.

"We were thinking that the funeral should take place on Thursday, but we naturally leave it to you to make the final arrangement. Your old room here, in your old home, is ready to receive you.

"May the Lord console you in your sad loss.

"J. J. HANSEN-BRO."

His heart almost ceased to beat as suddenly as it had begun to throb just before. Otherwise he felt nothing. The letter told him nothing. A few unreal sentences about "God called her to Himself" and "fell asleep in the name of the Lord" "on the night between Friday and Saturday, at three o'clock."

The night between Friday and Saturday, at three o'clock. He sank on to the sofa, as though struck by a blow that stunned him. His face was as white as chalk and his expression almost lifeless.

On the night between Friday and Saturday, at three o'clock, his mother had died—and just at that hour he had been with——

A sunbeam fell into the room with a perfectly meaningless warm smile and outlined the window on the floor. His eyes dwelt on the black lines of the window-frame around the patch of sunlight, and suddenly a memory arose in him. One day she had brought him in a slice of bread and cheese, and she had had such a sly look, because there happened to be a double layer of cheese on part of the slice. She stayed and watched him while he ate it. "So you got it down," she said when he had finished; and she looked as though she too had managed to get it down.

And now she was dead, on the night between Friday and Saturday, while he—— He threw himself face downwards on the sofa.

He had lain motionless for an hour, when he became aware of a severe pain in his hands and a helpless loneliness in his heart. He had been lying on his clasped hands and had driven the knuckles into each other.

He turned over on his side and saw the patch of sunlight on the floor. For the moment he associated it with the sunshine below the schoolroom window many years ago, and thought of the picture-book, the bound Sunday school papers, with a picture of a little boy lying in his bed, while his dead mother stands like a guardian angel by his pillow, watching over her little lad. In those days he believed that all dead mothers came at night to look after their children. Many a time when he awoke he had listened for her breath to assure himself that she was really alive and near him, and in his gratitude for this he had repeated the little verse she used to say, after she had said good night: "Softly sleep—Sweetly dream—The Lord you keep—Trust in Him."

The sofa he was lying on was a present from her. The little cushion under his head she had made herself. It had in it something of the gentle security that belonged to her person.

Weary with sorrow and tortured by conscience, his head buried itself deeper in the little cushion. The Sunday school picture of the dead mother standing by her child's bed-side flickered before his consciousness, he clasped his still smarting hands and, as at last the tears began to trickle down his cheeks, he repeated softly and in his childhood's voice, almost escaping from the present: "Softly sleep—Sweetly dream—The Lord you keep—Trust in Him."

With a vague idea of his mother's presence, he dozed off like a little child that cries itself to sleep.

When he awoke, the news had penetrated him with its dull, heavy calm.

He got up and began to pack—slowly and laboriously, as though it took a lot of thinking to find out what had to go into the trunk. Now and then he lingered over something or other which reminded him particularly of her, a handkerchief she had worked with his name, or a pair of socks he had seen in her hands the Christmas before, when she was darning them with the same expression of physical enjoyment with which she had once watched him eat the bread and cheese.

He was interrupted by a knock at the door. The second of his three landladies, the "deaf" one, came in with her flurried hop, like a sparrow, and her shy grin.

"Excuse me, Mr. Dahl—ho-ho—it's your friend, Mr. Barnes—ho-ho—may he come in?"

He hesitated for a moment and then nodded.

She hopped around: "That was all—ho-ho—I wanted to ask." He saw her back view, flat and pendulous, as she hopped out of the door, and heard her say outside, with the chronic cold in her voice: "Yes—ho-ho—you may come in—ho-ho—I only wanted to ask first." Then Barnes came in.

"You're packing," he said. "Are you going away?"

Dahl was standing with a waistcoat in his hand, his eyes fixed on the trunk. He turned to Barnes, still holding the waistcoat. "Yes," he said, "my mother is dead."

Barnes did not answer a word. A shadow fell upon his face and his eyes dropped to the floor. Dahl turned again and packed the waistcoat. When he reached for the jacket he saw that Barnes had taken a seat.

He sat motionless, looking before him. It was impossible to tell whether he had heard what Dahl said, or whether it had escaped him, as any commonplace remark might have done. All the same, Dahl knew that Barnes was silently sensitive to all that was passing within him.

"Can you understand, Barnes," he said slowly, "that one's mother can die? I don't mean the death of the *body*, but that she can *cease to exist*. Somewhere or other she must be, don't you think so? Only we can't see her."

Barnes had raised his eyes to him; but there was nothing to be seen in them. They looked as if he had taken all the expression out of them—his usual watchful, all-seeing look was turned within. As he sat there with the clear signs of a youthful vice, with his intelligence, as it were, laid aside for the moment, but yet with his face heightened by a strange, silent knowledge, he seemed something more—or something less—than human. With his leaden complexion, his heavy eyelids and clammy hands, he looked like some friendly gnome who had come out of his mound and waited mutely to hear if he could be of use to the man before him. Something about him showed that he knew all that was passing in the man's mind.

Dahl went on with his packing. But suddenly he dropped what he had in his hand and turned right round to face Barnes.

Then he said, after a little hesitation:

"Do you know where I was at the moment my mother died?"

Barnes gave a look of ordinary inquiry, and Dahl answered:

"I was drunk and sleeping with a woman."

After that he turned his back to his friend and went on packing.

"Didn't you know your mother was ill?" asked Barnes.

"No," said Dahl, "I knew nothing." He handed Barnes the schoolmaster's letter.

Barnes read it and put it down in silence.

All at once, like an unhappy boy confiding in a schoolfellow, Dahl said:

"Barnes—what if Mother saw me at that moment?"

Barnes looked at him totally mystified.

"They say," said Dahl—and it seemed to Barnes that his face and voice were just the same as when they were both in the first class at the village school, "they say that at the moment of death a person visits those who are dearest to say a last farewell. And who else should Mother go to but me?"

He hid his face in his hands.

Barnes looked at him in pity. He shook his head almost imperceptibly.

His friend had given up his theological studies, entirely convinced of the meaninglessness of Christianity. He had not a thread left of all the web of dogma, not the slightest spark of hope of the immortality of the soul. And here he was, devoured by old village superstitions.

Barnes got up and gave Dahl his clammy hand.

"Good-bye," he said, and his whole face showed that absence of indiscreet commiseration which, more than any other form of sympathy, wraps the heart in charity.

Dahl nodded and knew his friend had felt his silent gratitude.

Smiling like an eye drunk with sunshine lay the blue sound between the green islands. The little toy steamer with the red band on its funnel glided gently towards the market town, which lay clustered about its church in a sunny, holiday peace.

Dahl stood on deck looking beyond the town. A good two miles behind it lay Bakkeböl School. The road with its willows lay hidden.

There all the boys would be going into town on some pretext. When they met him they would grin with shamefaced joy, then look serious and sympathetic, because his mother was dead, and Holger Enke would gravely come away from the crowd and look at him with his big eyes, which had not nearly enough room for all the goodness that struggled in them—and then Jens would begin to cry.

Rubbish. Holger Enke was in prison, and the others were grown up and all had their work to attend to. . . .

Sail-maker Berg stood in his accustomed place with his hands buried deep in his trouser pockets and his face closed, as usual, upon its unfathomable interior.

Over there was Henriksen's window. Now it was a potter's.

Just outside the town, where the road turned off to "The Wood," he met Helen Urup, deeply sunk in her own thoughts. As she looked up and recognized him, a brief gleam was kindled in her eyes and sprang back like a little spark over all the years to her mother's garden and Henriksen's, and awakened the same memories in Dahl. Their steps became halting and uncertain, as though they thought of stopping to talk; then they both walked on with a polite greeting.

He turned round, looked after her, and thought of Barnes.

Farther on, the road with the willow trees turned up to Bakkeböl School. There was nobody to be seen; alone he reached the old road, and alone it received him.

He broke off a willow rod and began to scrape off the green bark, while his feet reluctantly carried him homeward to the school.

A dull burden hung upon him. He scraped slowly and with care, as though it was a piece of work that had to be well done, and he would not go home till it was finished. He made it last. So long as he had not seen her in death, it did not seem really true.

At last the willow rod was shining white. He stood looking at it irresolutely, unable to remember what it was he wanted it for.

After all, it didn't matter, but in a strange way it seemed urgently important that he should remember. Once or twice it nearly came back to him, but was gone again before he could seize it.

In irritation he swished the air with his rod—and dropped it in terror, just as if Holger Enke had really come through the gap in the hedge and a fat little flat-headed rustic were bellowing on the road.

It was here, on this spot, that he had birched the pot-bellied little fellow after Lillebror's death, and Holger had given him his knife, and he had gone home to his mother and told her what he had done and asked her forgiveness.

Now he was to go home to her again, and he had much to confess and to beg forgiveness for.

Home! To kneel before her, to tell her all and beg forgiveness!

There was the fence, grey and uneven with age, along which he used to slide his hand; the rounded cobble-stones of the yard, each with its face; Hansen-Bro and his wife, who were not given time to say their well thought-out words of consolation, but, in answer to a look in his face, opened the door of the room where the black coffin stood.

He remembered that he was going to kneel and confess, but he did not do so. A boy had entered the room to beg his mother's forgiveness, a young man stood looking in deep earnest, but coldly, at the body of a woman—the stiff crossed hands, the thin face, yellow as wax, whose expression he did not comprehend. The smile that had stiffened about her mouth, and that froze his heart, was something he did not know.

A pair of tender, watchful eyes, a smile of mutual understanding, a look of painful joy about the brows—that was his mother's face when she turned it to him, the only one he had seen, the one that was both hers and his; for now he saw that he had always regarded her as his property.

But there was nothing left of what had been his. She had gone from him. The unfathomable smile he was now looking at, which would not disappear—that was private, that was hers alone.

He looked at her own, last smile and seemed to hear a voice somewhere in the parish, a peasant woman's voice, perhaps Anine Clausen's, saying "the parish clerk's wife."

This casual phrase swept him aside, put him in his place as a child the clerk and his wife had had. And nobody protested. The clerk's wife lay here with her private smile, which would tell him nothing.

Ah, yes, she had been other things besides a mother. Child, schoolgirl, in love, married; she had lived the life of a human being, about which he knew but little. And this smile, the last she would give to him or to anyone else who came in, was neither happy nor unhappy, but uncannily mysterious.

Twice he had stood by the bier of one of his nearest kin, but never had he been a prey to this pitiless, impersonal chill, which now froze the depths of his heart.

Here, in this room, he had looked upon his dead father's face.

It was the same he had always seen, a little smaller in death than in life, fallen away, as though admitting that it had not invented the art of printing, but otherwise the same.

And Lillebror's white marble face, which only looked as if he slept; as if at any moment he might open his eyes and rise like a bubble from their bottomless depths. Lillebror, who had only "gone home," and who came back to give his fingers a last little pressure.

But this face before him was as strange to him, and as impenetrably closed, as sail-maker Berg's, which would never open to him.

And so was his own when he left the room and went past Hansen-Bro and his wife, up to his bedroom.

They stared at each other in bewilderment.

"And it's his own mother," said Madam Bro; "and he hasn't a word to say or a tear to shed."

"The man must be a freethinker," said Hansen-Bro. His wife shuddered and found comfort in the thought that her husband was a member of the choir and a teacher of religion.

XIX. Homeless

THE solemn chill dwelt in his heart and froze his senses. The sun shone unconcerned, the birds sang the whole summer day, but their twittering was only empty noise; the girls wept at his mother's funeral, the sorrow in their faces seemed to him a meaningless grimace. What had she to do with them! The farmers squeezed his hand sympathetically, without knowing that their solemnity was due, not to the loss of his mother, but to an uncomfortable feeling that one day they themselves would die. Hansen-Bro and his wife positively had tears in their eyes and had not the heart to acknowledge their natural feeling of relief that she was dead and all the furniture had come to them.

Of course it was theirs: Madam Bro had filled all the chairs with her broad person, and they had yielded and taken on her impress. It was no longer a home for him. Best say good-bye without delay.

Before leaving he wanted to look out through the hole in the hazel hedge. He went down the path, which was trampled by Hansen-Bro's big wooden shoes. Not even there was he reminded of home. He raised his eyes from the path in a profound longing for someone to be fond of; before him was the hole in the hedge, and he stopped and gazed, as through a telescope, over the country in the inexplicable certainty that somewhere within his vision was the one he longed for, and the very same for whose sake he had stood there from the first and looked for day after day—until he forgot what he was waiting for.

He was on the point of finding who it was, only he could not yet see it clearly; but he was convinced it would come.

He went in to Hansen-Bro and rented his old room for the summer.

Day after day he sat in the hedge and waited in vain. At last he gave it up and wandered restlessly about all the roads of the parish.

One afternoon he stopped outside Niels Peter's and Martine's

house, though he could not bring himself to go in; but Niels Peter had seen him from the window and came out, and so Martine's coffee was not to be avoided.

She already had three children and was expecting the fourth.

"They come pretty quick while you're young," said Niels Peter.

Dahl looked at Martine's shapeless figure and thought she wouldn't be "young" much longer.

She still kept her clear, shrewd eyes, but the rest of her face bore marks of a natural weariness. She caught Dahl's look and gave a smile of comprehension.

"We can tell," she said, "when we meet somebody who knew us before, that we *have* begun to go downhill. You needn't say anything nice, because it is so. It begins the day we get married."

"You're very encouraging about marriage," Niels Peter interposed.

"Well, bless me, it isn't the fault of marriage; I'm quite pleased with mine. It's life. It's all over—or we can just as well say it begins—when we get married. Then we go about for a few years with one child in our arms and another one coming on, and have to look after the house and the garden and the man just the same, and before we know where we are, we're so ugly that he can't see any longer that we're a woman, and so tired that we don't care either."

She gave Niels Peter a slap and added:

"Well, I've not got so far as that yet, but it isn't such a terrible way off."

"You've always been a bit of a prophetess, Martine," said Dahl.

"Ah, but it doesn't always come true," declared Niels Peter. "Last time we saw you she prophesied that Tine would either marry a gentleman or be an old maid. And then she went and married Peter Murer."

"Is Tine married to Peter Murer?"

Dahl was lost in thought. Martine looked at him a moment and said:

"Aye, pretty near all the young men in the parish asked her, and then she took Peter Murer, because his hands were the whitest."

Her clear eyes dwelt again on Dahl's face before she continued:

"I'm not sure that Tine is really happy.—Ah, you look at me as if you wanted to say: 'Is anybody happy?' after what I said just now. But the rest of us, we know what we're in for, and we

know it can't be any different. Life is what it is. But Tine wanted life to be like it is in the novels. She used to read a lot of them at school. And then she could dream. I remember that time just after we'd been confirmed, when we used to amuse each other with our confidences. Tine could dream just like an author can write. Going on, one night after the other, with the continuation, like the stories that run in the paper. She looked forward to going to sleep simply for the dreams. And in the day-time she remembered them all. I shouldn't be surprised if Tine still dreams every night and isn't properly awake in the day-time."

"Oh, she's awake right enough," said Niels Peter, "for there isn't a house so spick and span as hers, unless it's your own."

"Yes, but Tine's just like a sleep-walker," Martine asserted. "She can do everything just as well as we can when we're awake, but you pull her suddenly out of her dream and you'll see, she'll drop what she's got in her hand with fright."

"Here comes mother-in-law with a piece of news for us. I can see that by the way she's running."

This was true enough. Annine came in, out of breath, scared and full of her story.

"What is it, Mother?" said Martine. "What's the matter?"

"What is it?" puffed Annine. "What is it? Ah, you may well ask what it is!"

She looked up with eyes that were quite dazed with trotting faster than her lungs could stand, caught sight of Dahl, broke off in a fright, and sank into a chair.

But even if she had met the parson himself with a dean and a bishop, she couldn't have held her tongue.

"The Consul's dead," she said.

"Oh," said Niels Peter in the flippant tone suited to the rest of his sentence, which, however, he kept to himself—"has the devil taken him at last?"

"Yes," said Annine, still puffing and blowing. "The Consul's dead. I've just come from there."

The last remark seemed to bring her a certain relief; she became a little calmer, as one who had done her duty.

"I was in the house when he died—and the parson was there with the sacrament."

"Sacrament," said Niels Peter, spitting out a quid; "that's a damned sight too good for the old swine."

Annine looked at him flabbergasted. This expression gradually

passed into one of transfiguration, while she did not take her eyes off him. She was obtaining forgiveness on his account. She closed her eyes, hurriedly thanked God, opened them again, and looked at Niels Peter with the expression of motherly joy which, since his marriage, she had taken away from him and given to his children. A good boy he had been, though, to be sure, he was conceived in sinful lust, but that trick of saying the right word at the right moment, that he had from the tinman who had scattered her wits for five minutes that cattle-show evening and then gone off to America. She felt that he had been forgiven her, she need have no more remorse about him.

"You say that, my son," she said solemnly, "and strange it is that *you*, of all people, should say it to *me*, for it was the judgment of God that came from your mouth."

She collected herself a little and then went on with her story in a calmer tone. Her great terror had left her, and she was filled with thankful and righteous joy over the providence which rewards, punishes and forgives according to our deserts.

"I'd taken some eggs there," she said, "and then the cook says to me that the Consul's at the last gasp. 'Lord!' says I. 'Is it so near?' 'Yes,' says she, 'they're expecting it every minute. The parson's upstairs with the sacrament.' 'Then I'll sit down for a bit,' says I, for I thought it would be too annoying if it should happen just after I'd come out of the house, 'since I'm here anyway.' And so we sit and wait. But that was more than we could stand, sitting there waiting and keeping quiet, and so the cook says: 'Where's the parlour-maid got to?' for she'd gone up a long time ago with candles for the sacrament, and then she stole off in her stocking-feet and came back and whispered that they'd taken the key out of the door, so we could peep in, and it was awful, and she was stealing off again, but I got hold of her skirt and said: 'Let me have a look; you'll hear it all from the parlour-maid, but I've got to go.' And I put my eye to the key-hole and I saw it all, for the door was just where it should be.

"The parson had just got to where he shows the chalice to the sick man—he'd got as far as that when the cook was looking, but he hadn't got any further yet, because the Consul had begun to chuckle, and presently he was laughing out loud. Just as I got there he started to talk. But what he said I couldn't repeat, not when there are men in the room. He lay there laughing and looking up into the air, and we could tell from what he said that it was

women he saw, and they were stark staring naked all over. And the Consul he laughed and said things I can't repeat, and tried to grab at them with his fingers.

"But then all at once his face went stiff with fright, and he tried to duck under the bed-clothes, and his throat said 'krak—rak-rak,' just as if somebody was strangling him.

"And I felt my legs giving way under me, and I broke out all in a sweat like a fever, for when I saw his face and heard that 'krak—rak-rak' I knew it was the Evil One himself that had fetched him, and the sure sign of it was that the chalice that the parson had in his hand slopped over and spilled some of the wine, for all the world as if somebody had given it a kick as he went past.

"I didn't see any more than that, because the cook wanted to have a turn. But I'm going to the funeral, and if after that the parson makes a nice speech over him because of the money—and they'll pay him well—why, then I'll never believe any more.

"But, goodness me, now I come to think of it—Kirsten Smeds was in service there, when the Consul was younger, and gave notice because he wouldn't leave her alone. I'll have to tell her about his end. Ah, well, what a terrible thing death is, to be sure, when we're not prepared for it!"

Annine picked up her skirts and ran.

She was permitted to retain her faith. The parson had been so shocked by the affair of the sacrament that he begged to be excused the ceremony at the grave-side and asked his nearest colleague to officiate instead.

Thus it was that Pastor Barnes was once more invited to preach over a corpse in another parish, as had so often happened in the days of his glory. After an interview with his colleague he said yes.

And it turned out that he stirred the congregation more powerfully than ever before.

When the first hymn had been sung he advanced to the coffin and, without any introductory words, said the Lord's Prayer. Then, without adding a single word, he returned to his place and sat down.

The effect was such that not one of the mourners was able to join in the final hymn, the organ played it through alone, and the doctor saved the situation by giving the bearers a sign to move off with the coffin.

"Cad," said the Consul's son when he got home. "He shall be paid by the line. And the Lord's Prayer is gratis."

Barnes didn't get a penny for officiating, but he had gained the respect of the town, and in his own parish they were proud of him.

XX. Disappointments

DAHL was on his way home from his daily walk. He preferred to take it in the middle of the day, when men and beasts were asleep and the whole parish reposed in the calm of a great churchyard; and then he went where his legs might carry him, with a heavy, deathlike oppression at his heart.

The sound of a saw broke the stillness as he passed Claus Jörgen's farm. It was Hans Olsen at work in the carpenter's shed. Dahl went and spoke to him.

"So you're working in your dinner-time?"

Hans Olsen smiled.

"It's just a little 'cottage industry.' I sell it and get quite a good price."

"And what about your midday sleep?"

"Well, you know—we never took a sleep at this time when we were at school. We used to play instead." Hans Olsen looked at his work, as if it was still play to him.

He had not changed in the least. There were the same soft, fair curls about his forehead and temples, the same confiding smile, which looked like another bright, innocent curl. Imperceptibly his body and limbs had grown to manhood, while retaining the gentle roundness of his childish years. His head was placed so harmoniously upon his shoulders that it was impossible to imagine it placed otherwise, and his eyes looked straight at their object, frankly and with a curious discretion, as though it was out of the question that they should stray to what did not concern them. There was something remarkable about Hans Olsen, an air of being definitely protected, which had an almost irritating effect on Dahl and made him maliciously inclined to break in upon this blue-eyed peace. He began to talk about a man who had got drunk at the inn.

Hans Olsen smiled good-naturedly: "Well, they do sometimes."

And then there was an unmarried couple that had had children.

The same imperturbable, uncensoring smile: "We hear of such things now and then."

And Claus Jörgen had been watering his milk as usual? A quiet little shake of the head over the queer things people might take into their heads to do.

Oh, yes, Hans Olsen had heard all about life's temptations, but they were as far away from him as America.

"Do you always work at this sort of thing in your spare time?" Dahl asked.

"Generally. It amuses me—and then, you see, it pays better than spending money. And there's a little house I've got my eye on."

"I see, there's marriage in the wind?"

Hans Olsen smiled his little curly smile.

"Well, we're engaged, so marriage is the next thing."

It was obviously a thing one grew into, just like learning one's catechism, with confirmation as the natural result.

"So you've never joined in a spree over at the inn?"

Hans Olsen looked into the blue sky.

"Well, no, I can't exactly say I have."

His tone was placid, without a sign of dissociating himself from those who did go on the spree. Dahl was curious to know whether he understood their jollity.

Oh, yes, it was easy enough to understand, "for what are young fellows to do in warm weather but let off the steam? If they're alone they must make a noise now and then. Only I've never felt the want of that, because we've always been two, Ellen and I. Either we had each other's company or if we were alone we were thinking of each other. And then it's so simple just to—*live*."

Dahl went home full of an ugly ill will. He regarded Hans Olsen with the bitter feelings of a rejected rival, though it was scarcely possible to imagine any ground of contention between them. He was overwhelmed, but without humility, by a sense of his own smallness, and tried to reassert his superiority by reflecting that Hans Olsen was not particularly clever, but was at once put out by an inner voice which asserted convincingly that there wasn't a horse-dealer who would ever get the better of Hans.

No, that was sure. But why? He could imagine the far brighter Niels Peter, or any other of his old schoolfellows being taken in, but not Hans. He couldn't find a reason, but so it was.

So he made up his mind to sweep Hans Olsen out of his thought as something altogether too unimportant. But one thing would not go: a little fair curl on Hans Olsen's left temple; he continued to see it, and it aroused a feeling of dragging melancholy and bitter jealousy, as inexplicable as it was profound.

Later in the afternoon he stood dreaming by the old playground. He was roused by the slow beat of horses' hoofs and heavy cart-wheels grinding the gravel of the road. A young countryman lolled in the driver's seat with the lethargy of routine. He glared sleepily at Dahl and a slow twitching of his face showed that he had recognized him. Dahl approached the cart. Was it, or was it not, Kristian Mogensen?

Yes, it must be Kristian Mogensen with a K, who always had flies crawling on his back, because he was such a nice boy that even the flies knew it.

Then there came a drawling "Good day." What had become of the hushed, confidential tone of his voice? Where was the kindly brightness of his eye? Gone out for want of something to look forward to, as a lamp goes out for want of oxygen! There was not a trace of soul left in his face, nor in his broad, lifeless back—not so much as a single fly was to be seen on it. Kristian was finished, even before he had arrived at marriage, which according to Martine took the colour out of life.

How was it with Tine? A bitter craving for another disappointment in her case led his steps in the direction of Peter Murer's house.

As he came near he was surprised by a nervous fear of being seen, just as though he were still looking for her for forbidden reasons; he felt convinced that he would not dare to go in; even the memory of his dissolute life in Copenhagen could not overcome this old anxiety.

But when he saw Peter Murer standing by the garden gate, it passed off completely. She was married to that man there! The thought gave relief like hearty laughter. There were miles between him and her. He engaged unconcernedly in conversation with Peter.

Without thinking, he accepted the invitation to come in and have supper with Peter's wife.

Peter called Tine:

"Here's an old acquaintance, a gentleman, but not too much of a gentleman to take a bit of bread with us."

Tine came. There she was. He saw her for the first time since that evening in the hay. There she was. The same dark eyes with the long black lashes; he saw, nay, he felt her wonderfully soft mouth and the magic of her arms about his neck. He knew that this would always be the standard by which he would measure the women he might meet hereafter, whatever their position or culture.

Tine's pupils grew wide, so that her eyes were quite black before she dropped them to the ground. It seemed to Dahl that the path became alive under her gaze. Suddenly he heard Peter's voice:

"You two look as if you were bashful! Have you forgotten that you went to school together?"

"Now I'll get supper ready," said Tine, and went into the house.

It was the same walk, a natural, swaying dance, which he had watched one day with Christian Barnes.

As she brought in the supper he saw that something matronly had come over her, but it made her none the less attractive to men.

Peter talked, and she answered gently and kindly, but still as though most of her thoughts were wandering elsewhere.

A sleep-walker, Martine had called her.

Now and then she looked searchingly at Dahl, and when she did so it seemed that she lingeringly brought all her consciousness to bear. Her gaze gave him a feeling of maturity and experience of the world.

"Will you pass me the salt?" asked Peter.

She stretched her arm mechanically without taking her eyes off Dahl, but as she turned to Peter and her eyes passed to him, they showed a startled look, as though she had not been quite aware that he was present. The salt-cellar fell from her hand and her face showed confusion.

"You'll be crying before night," said Peter. "You've spilt the salt."

He leaned over and picked up the salt-cellar.

Tine did not know which way to look. "I think there's one of the children crying," she said, and left the room.

"Ah, women have their hands full, when once they've got children," said Peter.

As she left the room Dahl saw by her back that Martine's view of marriage was also to a certain extent true of Tine.

She did not come back until Peter called her in to say good-bye. All three went together to the gate.

"Look in again some time when you're passing," said Peter. "You won't find me, though; I shall be away on a building-job at the other end of the island. But Tine always has a bit of bread and a drop of beer, and it'll do her good to have a little chat."

Dahl looked inquiringly at her. She stood right in front of him in the moonlight as once before, with the same mournfully serious "No" in her deep eyes. But she was not so firm as then. Her pupils grew big and black, and though she stood motionless he had a notion that she recoiled and sank before him. A smile rose within him, but did not reach his lips, for the fair curl on Hans Olsen's left temple appeared with sudden irrelevancy in the air between them and again called forth the feeling of dragging melancholy and bitter, incomprehensible jealousy in his heart. He submitted sadly to the feeble prayer in Tine's eyes and said:

"I don't suppose I shall come any more; I'm going away soon."

XXI. The Toy

DAHL sat in the hazel hedge and Hansen-Bro was digging in the garden. Suddenly he bent down and picked up something, smiled with his head on one side, and went towards the hedge. Dahl was looking down; the plump legs were advancing with intrusive familiarity. He did not want a talk and left the hedge to get away from him. Hansen-Bro caught him nevertheless.

"I have found something," he said, "which I am inclined to think must have been a toy of yours once." He held out what he had found.

Dahl gave a start and made a dash for the house, but felt, as in a nightmare, that his feet were like lead and held him to the spot. He looked up at Hansen-Bro, who did not seem to have heard what he shouted. Then the heaviness spread from his feet through his whole body, and he knew that he had neither moved from the spot nor shouted. It had all happened within him; he had cried out in jubilation: "Here it is!" and had run towards the house to give it to Lillebror, who was lying ill in bed and wanted to have his spade.

He stood with it in his hand.

"Yes, it is mine," he said quietly to Hansen-Bro; "that is——" He broke off and walked slowly away; he could not have said "It is my brother's" without bringing the tears to his eyes.

As he turned to thank Hansen-Bro he suddenly saw again the little fair curl on Hans Olsen's left temple, but now it was not Hans Olsen's, it was Lillebror's golden curl, and in a moment the whole of the little face was alive before him with its bottomless eyes. Then he could no longer hold back his tears; they ran down his cheeks as he went to the hedge and sat in it.

Hansen-Bro went indoors. "He's an egoist," he said to his wife. "At his mother's funeral he hadn't a tear, but as soon as he saw one of his own old toys, he cried."

Dahl sat a long while in the hazel hedge, humiliated to the depths of his being. He understood now the dragging melan-

choly, like home-sickness, and the bitter jealousy he had felt in the presence of Hans Olsen. That honest, untainted fellow lived, without knowing it, in close touch with the world of Lillebror and the language of heaven.

When he rose from his "chair" in the hedge, there rose at the same time from the depths of his being a firm resolution, the full implication of which was not yet clear to him: from now on he would have but *one* aim—to regain his lost paradise, for he knew that there alone was it possible for him to live at peace with himself.

But he would get away from this home, which was no longer his.

With the little rusty spade in his hand, he went across the playground and stopped in front of the closed elder. It was Tine he had been running after that Sunday, when he lost his hat and saw that the elder no longer stood open.

Tine! He did not know why, but to her and none of the others he would go before he left. He would say good-bye to her; to her, who without wishing him any ill had enticed him out of his childhood's paradise.

She was standing by the garden-gate, looking far away along the road, as her habit was when she had time to spare.

She saw him in the distance, coming nearer and nearer. The ground swayed beneath her, so that she had to hold on to the gate. She fancied he was walking inevitably towards her, bearing her fate, and she felt that, whether he came to her in coldness or in warmth, he brought sorrow with him.

Then he stopped and looked at her a long while without saying anything. But in the silence between them she heard more than at the moment she was capable of understanding, more than she would be able for many years to translate into thoughts.

She stood with bowed head; at last she slowly raised the gentle eyes with their long dark lashes to him and asked, since she dared not prolong the silence, whether he would not come in.

He shook his head.

"I have only come to say good-bye. I'm leaving to-morrow.—I hope you will be well and happy."

"Then perhaps we shan't see you any more?" she said. Her voice died away softly, like the last note on a delicate instrument.

"No," he said, "I shall not come here any more. Good-bye."

"Good——" No more came, not even a whisper. But she looked at him in a brief, bright gleam, which dazzled her own eyes so that she had to shut them—a brief gleam of smarting misery, which was smothered and hidden in darkness.

He walked quickly away. She had looked at him like a girl who would gladly live, but who knows she is to die and feels it is better so.

At the crossroads he turned and looked back.

She was still standing at the gate. Her head was bowed, she was looking at the ground, her hands hung listlessly over the gate. She looked like one alone in the world.

For an instant it was as though his consciousness was transferred to the listless, strangely relaxed figure yonder: he became aware that she was glad she would see him no more, but that she was weeping over it.

Suddenly she straightened herself, as though someone had touched a hidden spring which concentrated her whole being on one object.

Her two children had come out, and the little one had tumbled down the steps.

When Dahl reached the playground again, he stopped and felt in his pocket. He took out the little spade and stood looking at it for a moment. Then he went into the churchyard.

There lay the three graves, his mother's new and high, his father's sunken, and Lillebror's which had become a little flower-bed.

He carefully parted the flowers and stuck the spade deep into the ground.

Then he went over to the school, paid for his room, and announced that he would leave the following day.

XXII. A Vision

EARLY next morning Dahl went out into the garden to look through the hedge for the last time. Kristen the sexton was pottering about with a wheelbarrow.

"Well, you're going to leave us?" he said.

"Yes," said Dahl, looking at the old pipe which dangled from Kristen's toothless mouth. It was the very same he had played with when it was new. Now all its glory was gone.

"You can't see God Almighty and heaven and earth in the lid of your pipe now, Kristen," he said.

Kristen laughed: "Fancy you remembering that! It was the very day your little brother came into the world. Aye, that it was. No, there's no shine left in that pipe-lid, it don't reflect anything now. It's gathered the dirt of years."

Dahl went back to the hedge. Reflect! Was not that just the word? We reflect the world according to our brightness. Our eye sees heaven or hell or merely the green earth, according to our disposition. What would it be that his mind would reflect at the last?

He stood on the bank with his hand on a hazel-branch. The question stuck; he stood musing over it. He was not thinking; deep within him lay a weary, patient expectation. He was scarcely conscious of anything else, had no idea of the passage of time.

All at once the bank seemed unusually high, and he had a feeling that he was holding on to the hazel-branch because he was afraid of falling into the ditch. His legs seemed very small and short.

At that moment he remembered why he was standing there. He was waiting, tired of it but yet patient.

For it was the day after the fête in "Fredeskov." He was waiting here, just as he had done the first time. He clearly remembered the little girl in the pink frock, with the packet of sweets and the eyes that you could go on looking into.

Now he knew her. Every feature was there, the eyes and all that he had seen so often in school without knowing that they were what he was waiting for.

It was Tine!

That was how she looked the first time he saw her.

Tine!

Even then.

As he stood there he "went off," sinking, as it were, deeper and deeper into himself, while a question seemed to bore its way into him—was Tine in some insoluble way bound up with his life?

His thoughts stood still, but he could feel how the question went on boring its way deeper and deeper in. . . .

He gave a start. There had been a sharp flash, as though a bomb had burst just in front of him. Within the flash he saw much more than he was able to retain. For he saw there his whole life to the very end.

He could not keep hold of the details.

Only this: that in a fanatical search for the Philosopher's Stone he entered a life which was fantastically rich in inner experience.

But what were they? He had seen them. Now they were gone.

He remembered none but the very last: a green plain—a woman in a pink garment—she beckoned—he stepped down on to the plain—all became dark.

But the woman, it seemed to him, who stood at the end of his life, was Tine.

He stood still, looking out through the hedge for something which seemed already decided. Something inevitable.

Annine Clausen came trotting past, called out "Good day," got no answer, ran on to Kirsten Per Smeds', and said:

"Now isn't it a queer thing? Here I come past the hedge by the school, and there stands the clerk's son just as he used to, looking past me with eyes with no bottom to them, just as he did when he was a little new-born baby and I said to his mother: 'What can a little chap like that be looking at?' I said. Just the same as that his eyes looked now, you'd think the soul didn't grow any older. Oh, well, oh, well, what a queer thing life is, to be sure!"

A good hour later Dahl walked across the square in the market

town, on his way to the harbour. Sail-maker Berg stood outside his door with his hands in his trouser pockets.

That was the man he had always wished he could get to "stand open," that he might see what he had got out of sailing all round the "closed" world and seeing everything there was.

Dahl was truly a visionary to-day. Berg stood open, and indeed there was nothing in the world to conceal. He was no more alive than Frederik VII, except that he could spit and twitch his eyes.

Dahl had come to town too soon; there was half an hour before the steamer left. He went into the hotel for a cup of coffee. As he came out he startled a couple, who separated hastily in the corridor.

They were the chambermaid of the hotel and young Consul Urup, Helen's husband.

That was his last impression of home.

Book II

XXIII. Nanna Bang

MISS NANNA BANG sat in her room, which was cosy as a warm little nest. Her brown eyes gazed into space, as though they had a favour to ask of somebody. A moment before, the air had been so thronged with thoughts that none of them could really reach her. Now there was not a single one; they were all gone, but not before each had laid its little burden upon her bosom, and their weight now made her breathing difficult.

She rose and went to the piano to play herself free, glanced at the pieces that lay there, and tossed them aside. The *revue* song, that was too insipid. Underneath that, something she knew too well, and it was too sad. But there was "*La brune Thérèse*"! No, that was too gay.

She went from the piano to the writing-table. There was her father's inkstand, which she was usually so fond of. She dropped her eyes as though it had hurt them and turned away, looked at herself in her mother's toilet mirror, a little shiver twitched her shoulders, and she went to the window and looked out.

The quiet old street lay dark and lifeless. Close by were the lights and crowds of Östergade, but they could not be seen. It was like life, which one knew was going on somewhere round the corner.

The quiet street seemed even quieter, and the room itself was full of the defunct peace of eternity, like the choir of a church.

She had a feeling that she had just come home to her parents, after seeing a girl friend to a ball which she herself was not allowed to go to.

In a little niche, so arranged as not to attract the attention of strangers, stood the crucifix from her home. She had hung her rosary about it. A little cloth could be drawn before it, in case anybody came who need not know that she was a Catholic.

She sat down and looked at the crucifix, because she had nothing else to occupy her. And since her thoughts were unoccupied,

the crucifix was free to express itself as it pleased; and thus it was that, as in her childhood, it seemed to her to be a living, protecting being. It led her eyes round about the cosy little nest she had made with all the things from home. There stood the great inkstand; she went and put it straight and could not help smiling, because she thought it had a look of fatherly approbation.

The smile made her want to look at her face, and as she stood before the mirror she caught herself in a favourite gesture of her mother's, putting her hand up to her hair.

Then tears came into her eyes. She sat down in the middle of the room and was lonely. There was too much home in her room; she longed to talk herself away from it.

There was the student who lived in the next room; he had come back to town after his mother's funeral, but he had gone out without looking in for his usual cup of tea.

It was easier for the other girls in the shop, who had not known a cultivated home. They married, for they were not so difficult to please, and those who did not marry, amused themselves.

She felt her genteel poverty so much in comparing herself with them—she with her languages and her music.

But *they* knew what life was. And they got off quite cheaply into the bargain.

And they had known life ever since they came into it. They had been brought up with every liberty. Well, but she was thankful for having been screened in a good home and for her memories.

But here she was, shut in with her twenty-eight years and her one grey hair, which she had thrown into the stove.

Here she sat among all the nice things from her old home, which formed a ring about her and closed her in—just as though her parents, even when dead, would hold her back from any participation in "life"! In a few years she would have run to seed as an old maid.

The scornful words, which she herself had so often used with a girl's flippant superiority, drove her from her chair.

Then she found she had tears in her eyes, and went and opened the window. The summer air was mild and warm; she leaned out and let it caress her cheeks and tickle them with her hair.

She drew herself up with a start and closed the window. With a defiant toss of the head, she broke through the confining ring of the old furniture, put on her most striking hat, and looked in the glass. She could see that the face confronting her was well worth noticing.

And now she would go out into the crowd, where no doubt she would meet somebody or other she knew. Or what harm was there in meeting somebody she didn't know and taking a stroll—perhaps in Tivoli? At all events, there would be a little excitement, a little adventure in that. Her hands were a trifle feverish as she pushed in the hatpin. Her face in the glass was already replying to some gentlemanly man who asked if he might walk a little way with her.

She gave a little, short laugh: "I believe I'm out of my senses!" But she continued to nurse the thrilling idea, until her cheeks grew hot.

Then she was anxious lest she might not be able to break off at the right moment—but the girls in the shop always managed to come safely out of their adventures. She looked round the room and felt that her decision *was* taken already.

It never occurred to her that the whole thing might end in an ordinary evening stroll from Kongens Nytorv to Raadhusplads, without anybody thinking of addressing the pretty little lady with the well-bred look.

With bright, shining eyes she walked as in a dream through the main streets. Conscious of her wicked purpose, she dared not look at a single one of the faces she met.

She reached Raadhusplads unmolested and went on without feeling disappointment. She had a notion that her adventure was waiting for her in the glare and crowd outside Tivoli, for good or evil. With gleaming eyes which took in nothing, she approached the red gates.

It gave her a thrill all through, right down to her knees, when she felt an arm thrust into hers and heard a man's voice say: "Shall we take a turn inside?"

Her crucifix, her furniture at home swirled before her eyes. She had a foggy feeling that the face that smiled at her out of all the flickering glare was well known to her; it had something to do with the furniture and the crucifix—why, of course, it was the student in the next room, who used to come in for tea—

and tears came into her eyes, because she was not alone, and she laughed, because she had been so foolish, and went on laughing, like a regular little attack of hysterics.

When she had finished laughing she turned serious, good and a trifle solemn, and asked whether it wouldn't be better to go home for a cosy cup of tea.

Yes, after all Dahl would prefer that to Tivoli.

Soon after, they were back in her room. She went to the crucifix and moved it a little forward, thinking it had got too far back in its niche. Then she went out and made tea.

While they drank it she told him the story of her fallen sister, dwelt on all she had done for her, and asked if he did not agree that she could not receive her sister when anyone was there.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," said Dahl with hesitation.

"You're like Father!" she exclaimed. "Yes, you are, just now, when you really understand quite well and yet won't agree. You think it would be better if I let her come?"

"I think the people who would refuse to know you because of that sister are not worth knowing," he said.

"We—ell," she objected, "it's easy for you to say that, but what friends should I have left? I have hardly any as it is, and if people get bored they stay away."

She went to the piano and played "*La brune Thérèse*."

He sat smoking a cigar. She laughed.

"How you do smoke!" she said. "This room will have an awful smell of men."

He watched the smile spreading over her lips, and fell into a reverie. Without his understanding why Martine's words about the Vissingröd miller's man recurred to him. He looked at her.

"Take those eyes away," she said, laughing.

There it was again, that feminine, powerless, reluctant and yielding look. He continued to look at her, and the longer he looked, the more self-surrender there was in her laugh.

Then it came upon him, without any conscious intention; impelled by an irresistible delight in his power, he went over to her, and without taking his eyes off her, without saying a word, began to undress her.

She looked into his eyes in dismay, made a deprecating gesture, but unavailingly; her lips swelled in a voluptuous smile, her eyes closed, and she turned pale as in a swoon.

Then, a little scared, he came to his senses. Of course he

intended her no harm. But he could not leave her like that.

He carefully undressed the fainting woman, carried her to the bed, drew the coverlet over her, kissed her hair, and went to his own room.

When the door had really closed behind him, she opened her eyes and fixed them upon it.

And then she thought she was so glad, because he was so good, and then the tears began to trickle and went trickling, until there was no longer a need for them, because she had sorrowfully fallen asleep.

Dahl stood in his own room looking into the street, in the belief that he had overcome a temptation.

XXIV. Mother and Daughter

“**N**O,” said Barnes, “no, I don’t think so. After all you have told me, I believe you ought to stick to the theological faculty.—What money have you got?”

“What I have inherited will last about ten years, if I’m not extravagant,” Dahl answered.

“Then you’ll be able to read at leisure and follow your own interests without having to chase round after a degree.—And is there any other subject that specially attracts you?”

Dahl shook his head.

“Well, then, in your place I should stick to theology. It offers lots of interesting side-tracks, and perhaps on one of them you’ll find just what you want. If I were not already well on the way to an M.A. in English, and if it were not for my holding a scholarship, which would make them look down their noses if I dropped what I’d been doing, and, last but not least, if I hadn’t to think of making my living, I should myself change over to the stupid old theological faculty. As things are, I have to be content with following my passion on the sly, like a poacher.”

“Poacher?” Dahl repeated. “Why, what are you hunting?”

“I’m on the track of the religious feeling.”

Dahl looked at him in surprise. “I thought you were an unbeliever.”

“The one doesn’t exclude the other.”

“Religion——” Dahl began, but Barnes interrupted him:

“Oblige me by not confusing religion with the religious feeling, and further by remembering that Christianity is not the only form of religion on this earth—and certainly won’t be the last. The religious feeling seems to be just as ineradicable as the instincts of self-preservation and propagation; it has always created and will continue to create religions. And Heaven only knows to what it might lead mankind if it were not so shamefully maltreated in churches and temples.”

“Churches and temples?” said Dahl. “You seem to think that the religious feeling in Christianity and outside it——”

Barnes interrupted him again:

"There is only *one* religious feeling, my boy, and consequently in *reality* only one religion."

"But you insisted just now that there were many——"

"Yes—many *forms* of religion. You can find them in Asia, Africa, Europe, in every part of the world, and you can find them in all ages, the *forms* of religion. And the religious historians can dissect and annotate and classify them; that's neither here nor there. These forms are only dead remains of the life that created them, sloughs that the snake has cast, showing that it once lived in them, but the snake itself, the religious feeling, is forgotten by these learned gentlemen in their interest for the slough.—It is the snake itself that interests me."

"And you think there is only *one* snake?" asked Dahl.

"Ye—es," said Barnes, "but of course it looks rather different according to its age and development. May I explain in a few words what my ideas are about religious feeling, religion and churches?"

Dahl nodded, and Barnes went ahead:

"Let us imagine a primitive people. Its feelings are concerned with certain definite things, which it either wants or cannot abide; its development consists in the struggle for or against these things. But besides these feelings there exists an uneasy, uncertain sense of a relation to something unknown, of superior power, which can influence man and which man in certain cases can himself influence; the indescribable something which for want of better knowledge, man takes to be a spirit, a god or a devil, or all three together. In some way or other an *atonement* has to be brought about between this something and man. Here you have the baby snake, the religious feeling in its cradle.

"Let us now imagine an individual entirely governed and inspired by this feeling, in such a way that through him it manifests itself in definite actions, because he is incapable of acting otherwise; then you have in him the religious genius of the tribe, and he has the influence of genius on his fellows.

"Let us further suppose that he performs one of his remarkable, suggestive acts just as a storm happens to cease, or a hostile army takes to flight; then it will be quite natural to connect these things and to conclude that the man of the gods has power over the gods. This provides food for the religious feeling of the mob.

"After him comes his disciple and rehearses the story: on such

and such an occasion the man of the gods did this and that, and it had its effect; let us do likewise. This disciple is the founder of the religion of the tribe. So now we have *the religion*. After the disciples come the priests, who carefully note down all the disciples have taught them, and now the saying runs: on such and such an occasion the man of the gods did this and that; this avails us, *and he who does not believe it and do likewise shall be thrashed*. There we have *the church*.

"But then the church is a thing fixed and finished once for all; the religious feeling is a living, growing life, and one fine day the church becomes too narrow, the snake has the choice of crawling out of its slough or being strangled in it. At that moment appear *the prophets*, who don't always get on well with the priests, even though the priests of later times gather the deceased prophets into the church and thus extend it.

"But, as I say, it's the religious feeling I'm hunting, not its cast slough, which at the most can only help me to follow its trail.

"From these cast-off clothes I can see that the religious feeling in its origin is just as base and foul as any other human feeling. In the beginning it is difficult to find any difference between a god and a devil. Man's notion of 'god' furnishes a good standard for the quality of his religious feeling. And for a good part of the way it turns out to be a pretty tainted sort of feeling, and the 'gods' at their best a set of jealous devils.

"Now let me take a jump forward to vindictive old Jehovah in Palestine. In that country, as we know, there arose a genius who said that God is love, said it so that it is heard and believed to this day in Europe.

"Now I will ask you to note that, if we are to go by what God allows to befall men and beasts on this miserable earth, there never was a madder or more insulting utterance than this, that God is love.

"But the saying stubbornly holds good. The religious individual learns in an inner way that God is love.

"Nay, even the non-religious, to whom this experience is barred, has no doubt that, if God exists at all, he must be love. As he doesn't see anything of this love, he just concludes that there can't be any god either.

"I don't know whether God—finally and definitely—is love; but I know that to this belief, and no further, man's religious feeling has reached to date.

"Now, so as to explain what I mean and to prevent your being deterred by the marvellous and seraphic fatuity of our theological faculty, let me recapitulate what I said before about religion and the church.

"When the Galilean was dead, leaving to the world as his new testament the maxim that God is love, the men who had known him came and said: 'The Galilean says that God is love; he who *believes* this shall be saved,' and that is true, because faith becomes an inner act which creates love, and that again increases the power of faith; and they said further: 'The Galilean was himself love, the Galilean was God.' Now we have *Christianity*, the religion. A little later this became: 'God is love, the Galilean is God; he who *does not believe* this shall be burnt.' *That was the church*. The religious feeling, which ought to have been love of God—since one cannot well entertain any feeling for love but love itself—because love of the *church* and hatred of heretics. Religion became theology.

"But then there were people who could not live on doctrines, people in whom the religious feeling lived and grew in steadily increasing purity. They were the mystics. To them dogmas and doctrines were not even worth opposing.

"Quietly, without any reformers' clamour, they *grew up* through the church's roof, so high that the very *conception* of God seemed to them blasphemous. They were content to love him unseen.

"Those are the ones you should study. In them you may perhaps find what you are looking for.

"But you look so surprised!"

"Yes," said Dahl, "I am surprised—at you. I had no idea you were religious."

"Nor am I—at any rate, my religious faculties are extremely poor—but my religious needs are great. Can't you understand that? Then imagine a man whose craving for women is great, but whose power of making an impression on them is small. Don't you think such a man would spend his time early and late in studying the erotic feeling, its nature and its laws? What do I want with religious feeling, when I wasn't born with the religious instinct? you may ask. I think it is due to an accident that happened when I was a child and left a defect in my character, which I should like to see healed. And I know that the religious feeling is capable of performing miracles of that kind.

"But it is not the only medicine for the character. There is

my father, a clergyman, who undoubtedly became one from conviction and desire. At one time he was a famous preacher. I was only a small boy then, but I have a lively impression of him, and not a good one. On one and the same day he became a good and upright man and a bad preacher. But it was not religion that did it. It was a great sorrow, a severe affliction."

He stopped for a moment, and then said, more to himself than to Dahl:

"But sorrow and affliction will not help me. They attack me just on my weak spot and make it worse. But it was not me we were to talk about. It was you. Keep on at theology and see if it hasn't some side-track which can lead you into 'the open.' The speech of the mystics seems to me at times like your 'language of heaven'—as far as I have understood it."

Dahl took out his note-book. "Can you tell me the titles of any books about mysticism which you would advise me to begin with?" he asked.

Barnes looked away, as though he was shy of something and wanted to hide it from Dahl.

"I can," he said at last. "And if I liked—if I liked——" He stopped and gave Dahl a look of reservation and scrutiny, then turned to the window without finishing his sentence.

"If you liked——?" repeated Dahl.

Barnes still stood with his back to him and talked at the window.

"If I liked I could take you to a house where you would find many of the books you want and have a chance of talking about them to one who is also looking for a forgotten language—and who has doubtless found that it was heavenly, even if—or perhaps just *because*—there was some earthly music in it."

"But you don't want to?" asked Dahl.

Barnes still kept his back to him.

"Oh, yes; why shouldn't I?" he said hesitatingly. "Why not?" At last he turned, so that Dahl could see his face. It was calm, indifferent, but a trifle absent.

"What are you puzzling about?" asked Dahl.

A thin smile appeared on Barnes's lips.

"Well, I was just thinking of one day when I was a boy," he said in a careless tone. "I was standing on a beam in the barn at home and I took it into my head to jump down. Something

within me said: 'You'd better not, you'll hurt yourself.' All at once I took the jump in spite of that. I hurt myself confoundedly—but I got over it."

"Yes, I see you did," said Dahl. "But what connection is there between that and what we're talking about?"

"No," said Barnes. "What connection has it with that? If you have time we can go there at once."

Dahl got up.

"I should like to know where it is."

"I can tell you that as we go," said Barnes.

"I am more or less a relation of hers," he said, when they were in the street, "but it's so distant that I can't be bothered to reckon it out."

"Her? What 'her'?" asked Dahl.

"The lady we're going to see. She's a widow. What I am going to tell you about her is not what I've been told, nor is it what I've thought out for myself, but a mixture of the two. She played rather an important part in the ideas of my early childhood, Mrs. Sonne."

"Mrs. Sonne?"

"Yes, that's her name—but then she was called Livia, Livia Holsøe. In my aunt's hateful talk, I could see that she had been down on Livia, as she was down on me, and though I understood well enough that Livia was much bigger than I was, I still felt uncommonly sorry for the unknown Livia.

"Of course I didn't understand all the things my aunt said about her to Father and Mother; above all, I couldn't make out what harm there was in it. They talked about it quite calmly while I was in the room, because I was so small that it was far beyond me. They forgot I hated my aunt so much that every word she said was imprinted in my memory as deeply as my loathing of her had penetrated my soul. And that was a long way.—Well, one fine day she died."

Dahl could not help laughing.

"You say it as triumphantly as if you had killed her yourself!"

"No," said Barnes, "I wasn't big enough for that. But I went to her funeral, you may be sure!"

"From what I remember of her snarling about Livia, and what I've heard since from Mrs. Sonne herself, I have put together this story:

"Her mother was an invalid and was nursed by my aunt. Poor woman! The doctor advised a stay in the South, and Livia and my aunt went with her.

"In Italy they made the acquaintance of a young *cappellano*, who gained great influence over Livia and her mother and was consequently the object of my aunt's intense dislike. He was not only a gifted confessor, who knew how to comfort the invalid, but at the same time, according to my aunt, he was so disgracefully handsome that Livia could scarcely avoid being converted. Whether it was the result of pious longings or of priestly good looks, I don't know, but certain it is that she begged her mother to let her enter a convent. Aunt smashed a tumbler when she told us about it.

"The mother had no objection, but Aunt went for the invalid woman with clenched fists and Martin Luther. It ended in a compromise: Livia was to go home and spend a year in self-examination. If after that she wished to be dead to the world, she might have her way.

"She went home, young and enthusiastic, and met a lieutenant of dragoons. *Verbum sap.!*

"That lieutenant had blood in his veins, Aunt said, and when she talked of the conversion she had worked in Livia, Father used to snigger and Mother smiled to herself and gave a little deprecatory toss of the head.

"But the lieutenant died as a young captain.

"And now—well, to put it briefly, it's too late for the Mrs. Sonne you're going to meet to become a nun and too early for her to be a widow. But the religion which she forgot during her married life has stretched out feelers after her, and the books by and about the old Christian mystics, which the *cappellano* got for her mother, are to be found on her table and in her bookcase. And the *cappellano* himself—well, it would surprise me if he hasn't a little altar in her heart, before which she kneels now and then to pray for support and enlightenment."

"Then she is living entirely alone?" asked Dahl.

"Yes—that is, of course, she has her daughter with her," said Barnes as he looked along the row of houses.

"Has she a daughter?"

"Yes—ah, here it is, No. 23. We go up here. Yes, she has a daughter; her name is Katharina. Eighteen."

A moment later Dahl found himself in a *home*. He was enveloped in a soft stillness which was full of ubiquitous life, and as he bowed to Mrs. Sonne and heard Barnes introducing him as a schoolfellow and a theological student specially interested in Christian mysticism, he had a vision of a wood in springtime, just before the anemones peep through the carpet of dead leaves. For a good while after he had seated himself in the window opposite Mrs. Sonne, this image continued to haunt his fancy, while he was replying to her—rather general—remarks about the Victorines, Eckhardt, Boehme, and the mystics of the Spanish school. But by degrees she detached herself clearly from the home which was her creation, and her personality captivated him so powerfully that he forgot what she was saying, simply in listening to the sound of her voice.

Her gestures had a lingering softness and a thoughtful tenderness, as though a motherly instinct were always ready to respond when called upon. Her voice, even when explaining, had a questioning note. Her eyes were self-contradictory: introspective and awake, experienced and uncertain, liable at the same time to bewilder by the wealth they contained and to be themselves bewildered by it. She talked to Dahl as a mature woman to a young man, but with a yielding readiness to bow to his intellectual powers.

With the daughter he had no conversation at all, but in spite of that he had a clear impression of her, since she was present in the room and in a way took part in everything her mother did.

Now and then he heard her voice and Barnes's, one with a rather forced familiarity, the other frankly cordial but with an occasional note of reserve.

It was her laughing, as it turned out, which put an end to the visit.

It began with a gentle clucking, like the sound of a brook in spring. It looked as if a ray of sunlight flashed across her face, which was hastily dropped on her bosom, while her mouth held back the next little cluck which tried to come out. Barnes glanced at Dahl, on whom her observant eyes had been resting when the first little cluck jumped out unawares.

"What are you laughing at?" he said.

Her eyes flew up at once to his questioning face and slipped

away as quickly as a bird hiding in a bush, and her mouth shut tighter on the laughter within.

Barnes glanced again at Dahl.

"Why, it was him you were laughing at," he said; "but I can't discover anything comic about him."

Then the pressure was too great; the little red knot she had made of her mouth came undone and her laughter trilled loudly through the room, cutting across the theological observations of the other couple.

Then it was her mother's turn to ask, and that really finished it.

When Dahl's eyes met hers he caught the infection and laughed, and Barnes joined in because the victim sat there laughing heartily without a notion that he was laughing at himself, and Katharina, who saw what had made Barnes laugh and knew that he was absolutely on the wrong track, started laughing again in a totally different tone, which caught Barnes's attention and made him serious.

His good-bye came with a surprise as abrupt as Katharina's first little cluck.

Mrs. Sonne fetched a couple of books from her writing-table, gave them to Dahl, and invited him to come again—some time when Katharina had finished laughing.

Dahl gave Katharina his hand, and Barnes's eyes moved doubtfully from one to the other; they looked as if each knew what was amusing the other, which was impossible; he himself felt that he was the only one who really knew anything about it, and that he was at the same time outside it and alone, which was unreasonable.

Mrs. Sonne saw them out. Meanwhile Katharina sat looking at the chair Dahl had occupied, and laughing at her own foolishness. What had made her give that first little cluck that Barnes had heard? Why, it was because, just as she was looking at the new face and trying to make out whether she liked it, it had suddenly occurred to her in a teasing way why she did her hair so carefully every morning and why it amused her to look in the glass so often and so long at a time.

She sat up in her chair and put all these follies behind her.

Then she imperceptibly glided into a reclining position. She sat with her cheek in her hand, and knew, with a deep feeling of tranquillity, that she would go on doing her hair carefully and

would continue to examine her face in the glass and dream over it.

She was left with plenty of time for her own thoughts. Her mother looked into the kitchen after saying good-bye. Katharina did not hear when she came in at last.

The silence of the room checked the words Mrs. Sonne intended to say. She stood looking at her daughter, who sat with her back turned, lost in thought.

Gradually, as she yielded to the feeling that was expressed in the girl's figure, the same mood took possession of her, and she had a vision of a stone seat high up on the coast of southern Italy, a seat where she herself sat gazing out over the sea with her thoughts somewhere far inland.

With the ghost of a smile at herself and her innocent foolishness, she sat down with her elbow resting on the table and her cheek in her hand in the same attitude as Katharina.

All the difference in expression between the two faces was that one looked forward, the other back.

But a moment later Katharina felt that she was no longer alone. She turned to her mother, gave a start, and exclaimed: "Why, Mother, how young you're looking!"

Mrs. Sonne got up; her eyes had an absent look, though she had obviously heard what her daughter said, and about her lips lay a tiny hint of a smile of a perfectly definite kind, which Katharina had often felt on her own face when she had just been reading some particularly delightful book and was amusing herself by mixing it up with her own everyday life. So Mother had not yet outgrown that kind of playing with one's fancy.

Mrs. Sonne noticed her scrutinizing look, felt that something must be said, and asked suddenly:

"What do you think of Mr. Dahl?"

As she said it she felt, for no reason at all, half shy at her question and tried to pass it off with a commonplace remark about him.

But Katharina put her head on one side, with a look of consideration, and then said frankly, emphasizing it indeed with a little decided nod:

"I think he's awfully nice."

Mrs. Sonne nodded. The subject was exhausted. She moved about the room with a curious indecision. Katharina followed her with her eyes. It looked as though Mother's feet had taken

leave to wander this way and that, exactly like a pair of horses when the coachman stays too long in a shop.

Now they stopped at the writing-table. A hand took a key and unlocked a drawer. Two little books—the green one and the red!—were taken out and placed on the table—where those she had given Dahl had lain.

Would Mother really lend him *those*? She could scarcely believe it, but caught herself wishing it. She herself had been refused, when once she had asked to be allowed to read them. And the reason given was that she would not understand what was in them. It was religion. But it couldn't be that alone which made them so sacred. There was something old and precious about them. They had been Grandmother's. One of them.

She felt inclined to ask whether Mr. Dahl was to read them; but then it occurred to her that her mother might perhaps say no, and she didn't want to hear that no.

To avoid asking the question she went into her own room, where for a while she wrestled with the problem what earthly difference it could make to her if Mother refused to show those books to Dahl, when in her own case she had accepted the refusal without a murmur.

XXV. Understanding

THE sense of a home clung to Dahl all the way back from Mrs. Sonne's; the sound of her gentle, hushed voice was still in his ears. All at once the vision of a wood in springtime reappeared, and Katharina's laughter reverberated over the anemones. A smile flitted across his face and he blinked as in a strong, vivid light.

The smile lasted until he met his "crooked" landlady on the rotten, creaking stairs. She gave him an oily grin, showed her teeth, and scowled. She had something hidden under her apron, so she was on the way to fetch spirits, to the terror of the deaf sister and the grief of the old aunt.

The deaf one met him in the passage, which always smelt as if his three landladies had had cabbage for dinner. She nodded, tittered and hopped about nervously, as she always did when a man appeared.

The old one followed him into his room.

"Welcome back again, Mr. Daahl," she said, with her broad country accent. "I haven't seen you since. You can't think how I've missed having to clean up after you. And so you got your mother buried?"

She stood facing him in solid self-possession, her broad, pleasant face glowing with tactful devotion. It beats me, he thought, how she can be related to Crooked and Deaf.

"What made you move into town?" he asked.

"Ah, my word," she said, "you may well ask. I come from down Köge way, and I could just as well have stayed there the rest of my days. But my husband died, and my son died, and then it was all the same to me, and after all, you see, I'm the aunt of this here pair of old maids that own the house, and so I thought I might as well come and help them. They want it too, I can tell you.—Well, I'm not going to disturb you; I only wanted to have a sight of you again."

Then she went back to her own room, quite pleased. She had feelings to spare and gave them to him ungrudgingly, without

a thought of return. Of course she would have liked to sit and talk awhile about his mother, but as he said nothing it naturally meant that he only looked on her as a stranger.

All the same, he had friendly thoughts of her as he sat alone. His old landlady was another one who gave him a sense of home. Yes, she was homely, old Martha. In a cornfield at Köge, in the streets of Copenhagen, in her two-half-witted nieces' boarding-house—everywhere she was imperturbably at home in herself.

He opened one of Mrs. Sonne's books to read of the mystics who sought their home in God.

Twilight came, the God of the mystics vanished in eternal nothingness, and Dahl felt lonely, far away from everything, like a hermit in a deep forest, a hermit looking with a sigh at the anemones peeping up from the luxuriant soil beneath the trees. A sudden craving for female society reminded him that it was tea-time, and he went into Nanna Bang's room.

She gave him a covert look and thought for a moment that the undressing of the preceding evening had been a dream. In any case, he appeared either to have forgotten it or to regard it as entirely innocent.

He let her make tea and accepted her waiting upon him as naturally as if they had been man and wife. After tea he proceeded to smoke a cigar. She sat watching the thick blue clouds for a few moments.

"There'll be an awfully mannish smell in here," she said in a rather high-pitched voice.

He offered to throw away his cigar.

"No, no," she exclaimed with animation; "go on. It's so pleasant to see you puffing away at it. You're like Father.—Do you know, I think this room has such a lot of home about it."

She gave her father's inkstand a little friendly nudge and enjoyed a look into her mother's mirror.

"We were Catholics at home," she said, pointing to the crucifix. "And I am still. Do you think that strange?"

No, he was just reading about the Catholic mystics.

"Tell me about them," she begged him.

While he was telling her, she sat leaning forward with her hand between her knees and looked smaller than usual.

"Now you're like Father," she said; "when he was young,

of course, about the time he married Mother, I should think."

A sudden blush spread over her cheeks. "Well—I mean—I didn't see him then of course—but I imagine he must have been something—oh, what nonsense I'm talking!"

"I don't see that," he said. "If I'm like your father it's only natural that you should think of him as he was when he was my age or thereabouts. I can quite understand your suddenly having the idea that you could see him as he must have looked before you knew him."

She looked at him a trifle doubtfully and inquiringly, but was reassured by his unaffected air, and felt gratitude and admiration for his understanding, even though he had not quite hit the mark.

"You're a dear," she said, after a genial little pause; "and the good thing about you is that one can tell you so. You *understand* what one means; most men always *misunderstand* a woman."

She looked at him with satisfaction; a moment later her eyes glanced away and an equivocal half-smile came over her face.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked.

"Nothing," she said, and started playing "*La brune Thérèse*" to avoid confessing, both to him and to herself, that she had been wondering which of them knew best, the men who understood or the men who misunderstood.

XXVI. Theosophists

NEXT day Dahl went to see Barnes and found a strange company, whom Barnes introduced: Petersen, a breeches-maker, Kjellström, a working shoemaker, and Bjarnöe, a man of private means. The three men soon left.

"What in the world were those creatures?" asked Dahl.

"Theosophists," Barnes replied.

"But what have you got to do with them?"

"To see how a religion arises and develops. To watch it and take part in it."

"You?"

"Yes. Of course the theosophical religion (which alleges that it *isn't* a religion) arose a long time ago, but the Hafnia congregation is still young—though it's beginning to show signs of the slight friction which by and by will give rise to the schisms inseparable from all religions from the very moment they quit the lap of divine revelation."

"Is theosophy a revelation too?" asked Dahl, who was not quite clear about Barnes's attitude towards it.

"Of course. We have everything. We also have miracles. No, it's nothing to laugh at. I think a miracle is an excellent invention. But it ought to happen a good way off, or else I don't believe in it. The theosophical miracles take place in India. That is where the mahatmas live, there and in Tibet. They are men who in loftiness of spirit do not fall far short of Jesus. But they seem to have more sense, as they don't show themselves and get put to death by the mob. They keep well hidden. Nevertheless there are people who have seen them."

"Do you believe in it?"

"Neither believe nor disbelieve so far. I'm still in the investigation stage."

"But those three who were here just now?"

"I've picked them for my particular friends on account of the frankness of their nature. Sophus Petersen, the breeches-maker, has done odd jobs in different countries, in Sweden last of all,

where he played ducks and drakes and drank snaps. One day he got hold of a theosophical book, and then he saw that he had the truth. He turned sober, and to get away from his tippling companions he and his wife learned breeches-making. Now they're established here and doing quite well. The wife does the sewing and pressing, while Peterson 'develops himself.'"

"How?"

"Spiritually. He is blessed with a calm enthusiasm and a naïve belief in everything taught by theosophy. On the whole it looks as if even more intellectually gifted people, who have been unable to believe in the dogmas of Christianity, have no sooner joined a theosophical society than they acquire the stomach of a spiritual ostrich and can digest anything in the way of incredible metaphysics. As far as Petersen is concerned, he has actually acquired more soul for every year I have known him. And since he came back from Sweden he speaks really decent Danish, only he has a trick of getting in a 'however' every time he opens his mouth. His wife's a rattling good woman."

"Is she a theosophist too?"

"M—no. Decidedly not. That it to say, she knows a lot about theosophical metaphysics and I should think in her heart she counts on its genuineness. But all the same she can't stand theosophy at any price."

"How can that be?"

"Well, that's what I was wondering for a good while, till I found the solution last Wednesday, when I was having a cup of coffee at Petersen's. It's all on account of a sofa."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Yes, a couch which Petersen got on the hire system, as he honestly admitted. I could see Mrs. Emilie purse her mouth as he mentioned it, and the look she cast at the sofa was not exactly one of affection."

"Perhaps she believes in cash payment on principle."

"No, it isn't that. No, but the sofa is a chastity sofa."

"A what?"

"Chastity sofa. You see, Petersen wants to develop himself, wants to become a yogi, a disciple of the mahatmas. But that requires absolute purity of thought, word and deed—including anything to do with the lusts of the flesh. You have to be a vegetarian both in your diet and your sexual life. But I don't expect Mrs. Emilie married with the idea of her husband

sleeping on a sofa. And then it's pretty hard lines that she should have to slave to pay it off. Petersen is all kindness towards her, but 'development' comes before everything. I anticipate trouble for that couple, though both have the very best intentions. Altogether religion has just as much power for producing unblestness as blessedness in this world."

"What was that other fellow, the little Swede, who looked like Strindberg?"

"Strindberg! Yes, you're right, he does. Strange, it never struck me before. The same mighty forehead and the little compressed chin, the genius and the son of a servant-girl. Just so, Kjellström is a miniature portrait of Strindberg, only mentally more harmonious. But just as fanatical in his speculations. He is a shoemaker, but you needn't laugh at that; Jacob Boehme was the same."

"Has Mr. Kjellström a chastity sofa too?"

"Yes, but he already has children enough to go on with. They fill every room in his little flat except one. There he has his sofa, his table, his bookshelves and his cigar-box."

"Then tobacco is not prohibited?"

"There are no cigars in the box. There's a machine for perpetual motion. You mustn't be so ready to laugh. If the saviour of the world could lie in a manger why shouldn't the conqueror of the world lie in a cigar-box?"

"Yes, but perpetual motion——"

"Can't be done. I know that. Can prove it into the bargain. No normal brain can produce a machine for perpetual motion. But then Kjellström isn't normal, he's a genius."

"No, look here, Barnes!"

"Yes, listen to me—Kjellström doesn't employ normal methods when he takes to inventing. He invents in a supernatural way. I told you Petersen wanted to be a yogi—Kjellström is a yogi. He sinks in meditation into the depths of his being—and there, in profound contemplation, he creates perpetual motion."

"Oh, I see!"

"Yes, but he *has* done it. It's lying in the cigar-box."

"*Lying*, I dare say, but it doesn't *go*."

Barnes leaned back in his chair and looked at Dahl for a moment.

"*I have seen it go*," he said calmly. "It went quite nicely by itself a couple of turns. Then it went to pieces, because it

was made of matches and bits of cigar-box. Of course it's a defect in a machine of that sort if it can only go for a minute, but still, a minute is a beginning. And when Kjellström explained the mechanism to me and put the pieces together—I *believed in him.*"

"Physics is hardly your special line," Dahl protested.

"That's why I went to a capable engineer and took him with me to Kjellström's. I didn't say what I was going to show him, or he wouldn't have come. Kjellström had put the machine together again. It went two and a half times round; then the matches fell apart."

"What did your engineer say?"

"I remember it word for word. He said: 'Well, I'm blasted!' Then Kjellström started in with his explanation, and then the engineer said once more: 'Well, I'm blasted!' More than that I couldn't get out of him before we'd gone a good way down the street. He stopped at a door. 'I'm going in here,' he said. 'Mark my words: perpetual motion *can't* be made—but blast me if I'm sure that confounded Swede *hasn't* made it. At all events, I'll get him a material that'll hold together for more than a couple of minutes. The owner of this factory will let him have the material he wants. The man must be given a chance of working at his machine. Either he'll do the impossible, or he'll invent something possible and useful—or else he'll end in a mad-house. What a devil he is! Blast me if I ever——' After that he went up to the factory. And now the owner of it has promised to supply Kjellström with all the material he wants—though he's a man with a scientific and technical education."

Dahl shook his head, laughing.

"And your third friend?" he asked.

"The seraph?"

"Is he a seraph? Well, I can believe anything now," said Dahl.

"The seraph is my name for him, when I think of him," said Barnes. "His name is Bjarnöe and he has plenty of money—can afford to do what he likes."

"What does he do, then?"

"He listens to the music of the spheres," said Barnes. "Yes, now you're grinning again. But let me tell you that I sometimes think it must be that he echoes in his playing. The seraph knows how to listen. I believe his idea is that by listening you can

find out the deepest secrets of existence. I know he thinks there is only one language that can express them, the language common to all mankind—music. Have you ever seen a face so pure, so angelically white as his? If an angel became man, he would have to look like him.

“And yet sometimes there is a heaviness about his eyes, as though a calamity was waiting somewhere, ready to fall upon him. I have found myself suddenly impelled to take him by the arm and say: ‘Come along, you’ll see, the world will come to an end one fine day; let’s slip over to some little out-of-the-way place while it’s on.’ I can’t get rid of the uncomfortable feeling that there is something or other which the seraph ought to be saved from.

“Well, I can see now, you’ve come to the conclusion that I’m a bit off my head and that my three friends are raving mad. Well, well, it’s quite true that there are some people who are looking for only one thing in the world. Blind to everything else on earth, each in his own fashion tries to find the impossible, the thing which, when he has it, gives him all he needs. They are looking for the philosopher’s stone.

“But what about yourself, my friend, who are trying to get into ‘the open’ and to live in the world of the language of heaven, which is hidden from ordinary mortals? Are you not hoping, just as these are, to find the philosopher’s stone?”

“Perhaps,” said Dahl. “And yourself?”

“I,” answered Barnes, “am one who goes about waiting for a miracle to happen to myself. I am a cripple hoping for recovery. A vice——”

He stopped and blushed hotly, for he saw in Dahl’s eyes that it had suddenly dawned on him what the vice was that had stolen away the strength of his soul and body. He looked down at the floor and nervously rubbed his clammy hands.

“It was grafted in me when I was a child,” he said, more frankly and unreservedly than Dahl had ever heard him speak. “And the very nature of my mind, my inexhaustible desire to track down other people’s thoughts and ideas, makes it impossible for me unaided to become the character I was born to be—and should hate to die without becoming. I am on the look-out for somebody who can make me whole. Whether it’s a god or a man that performs the miracle is all the same to me.”

XXVII. The *Cappellano's* Precepts

DAHL called on Mrs. Sonne to return the books he had borrowed. Katharina listened intently while he was telling her mother of the impression the books had made on him.

"I have a feeling," he said, "that they will have a determining effect on my whole life. I cannot say I have fully understood their language, which is at times obscure. But I believe they have to be *lived* rather than understood, and I have an idea that what now appears obscure would be revealed in the light of experience as clear and profound psychology."

Mrs. Sonne nodded and said with animation:

"Yes, yes—that is just it."

Dahl looked at her in surprise: "Do you *know* it?" he asked. "Have you lived it?"

But she shook her head.

"No, no—it is not for me—but I *know* it nevertheless. I have met—people who have made the experience."

"In me," Dahl continued, "they awaken a vague impression that I know what it is they are talking about. It is no more than the vaguest feeling, but it calls to me in a voice I seem to know better than any other. It is like my own inmost ego calling me home. I imagine an emigrant who gets hold of a book from 'the old country' and reads about places where he lived long ago, must have much the same feeling, and that a longing for home must spring up in him, so that he feels he can have no rest or peace until he revisits his old home.

"But unfortunately I don't know the way that leads to the experience. But I have a feeling that, even if it sometimes comes as a surprise, it is nevertheless the result of a preparation involved in the life led by the mystics.

"By the way, do you know where I have found the same experience expressed in modern phraseology and shorn of all ecclesiastical embellishment? This is what Tennyson writes about it:

“‘All at once, as it were, out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being; and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality seeming no extinction but the only true life.’

“I know that I have experienced something similar, but that that state is now closed to me—and that I shall have no rest until it opens again.”

Mrs. Sonne examined his young face attentively. His zeal was so youthful, and yet she had a feeling of solemnity and awe at the thought that his whole destiny was contained in this ardent desire of what he regarded as the one thing needful.

She slowly got up and went to the writing-table, where she took up the two manuscript books, looked at them a moment, and put them down again.

Katharina followed her movements intently. Yes—a smile of pleasure flashed across her face—now Mother was going to him with the red volume in her hand.

Mrs. Sonne paused for a few moments with the volume in her hand before she spoke, and Katharina felt, with a wave of hot anxiety, that at that moment her mother, with some hesitation, was adopting Dahl into her home.

Then she gave him the book. Katharina was relieved and glad. And yet she had no idea what was in the little red volume.

As she gave Dahl the book, Mrs. Sonne said:

“This is a description of the way, written by one who—while still young—himself attained to the experience. It is an account of the daily spiritual exercises which in his case led to a life that is not open to many.

“If you would like to borrow it, you may. And if you can profit by it, it will give pleasure to—him.”

Her eyes were turned to the window, her expression became absent; she seemed to glide away from them.

The very intimacy of her tone increased the distance between them, and Dahl felt the time had come for him to go.

Katharina saw him out.

In the hall he noticed that they were moving softly and in step, as though there was somebody they had agreed not to disturb.

As she closed the door he heard a little cluck and felt almost

irresistibly inclined to open the letter-box and call "Hullo!" after her. . . .

"Mother," said Katharina, when she was back in the drawing-room, "that man you were talking about, the man whose book you lent to Dahl—what kind of life did he have which is not open to very many?"

"He was led into a life which is not of this world," said Mrs. Sonne; "in it he lives and moves only as a friend and helper of mankind."

Katharina stood fingering the green volume.

"Is it Italian?" she asked.

"Yes, he was an Italian," said her mother.

"Is this his handwriting?"

"Yes." Mrs. Sonne took up the volume and restored it to its hiding-place.

Katharina watched her with her hand in the same position as if the book had still been there.

Then she swept her hand rapidly over her dress, as though brushing something off. "I think if one *is* in this world, one ought to *be* here," she said.

XXVIII. Nanna Bang Thinks Deeply

NANNA BANG could not quite control her nerves. It was just upon tea-time, and every now and then she got up and went into the kitchen to put the kettle on, but turned back each time, sat down, and glanced at the door.

It was fun making tea after he *had* come and sat waiting in her room.

But the last few evenings he hadn't come at all. It would soon be a week.

Before that he used to come every evening as though it was a matter of course that she should make tea for him, and afterwards he would sit and talk right on to bedtime. He behaved, in fact, exactly as if they were married.

She looked about the room and a warmth came into her brown eyes; she really had a home. She felt a little, religious cosiness in her heart, for she had quite come back to her religion lately. In the shop one never heard anything of that kind, and it was so easy to get out of the way of it. But since that evening when she *might* have gone the same way as her sister and had been saved from it—she looked at the crucifix, which had recovered its old life, and reflected that now she said her prayers again most evenings, as in her childhood.

But now it was half an hour past tea-time and she had to go out to her "Primus," but couldn't understand why he didn't come.

From the kitchen she heard the crooked one's snivelling voice and the deaf one's *staccato*. A clammy sense of loneliness crept over her. She clattered with the cups and produced a fit of coughing as she passed his door, but it was not opened.

Then she drank her tea in discomfort. The room looked like a stove that wouldn't burn; the furniture yawned with a dead emptiness, Jesus hung suffering mechanically upon the cross, and she sat mournfully munching a biscuit that tasted of nothing on earth.

She might just as well go to bed and sleep off her boredom.

No sooner was she in bed than she jumped up again with a start and brought her clenched fist down on the bed-clothes.

Could that be what kept him back, That he was afraid of forgetting himself again? For she had to admit that it might easily happen to a man when they sat every evening in such cosy familiarity.

But his fears were quite needless, for, now that she knew what might happen, it was easy for her to avert it. A woman may be taken by surprise, but when she has had a warning it is not very difficult to keep a man within proper limits.

But of course she couldn't tell him that. No, but to-morrow evening she could just go in and fetch him; that would show him that there was no danger in it.

And naturally, if there was any danger, she would not herself encourage him to come.

Why couldn't it have occurred to her this evening! Now she would probably lie awake all night waiting for to-morrow.

And, true enough, sleep deserted her. She tried to realize his thoughts—a man's thoughts. And she thought how pleasantly the days has passed lately at the shop, because she had looked forward to coming home, and how nice it had been to smile confidentially at the married women when closing-time came. She felt more closely allied to them than to the young girl assistants.

The house was still and every sound could be heard. She heard him turning over in his bed. So he could not sleep either.

But what was that? He was getting up? Great heavens, and her door wasn't locked!

Now he was out in the passage. She pulled the bed-clothes up over her head.

The front door clicked. He had gone out—at this time!

She struck a match. It was half past eleven.

Tears came into her eyes. For when a man gets out of bed and goes out at this time of night——! She was not so ignorant of life as that.

She dried her eyes on the sheet. Not that it was any concern of hers—that wasn't what made her cry—but it hurt her to think that a refined person like him could do such things. And it wasn't altogether pleasant to reflect that it was really her fault if he fell into the very thing he had saved her from.

She lit her lamp and looked in the direction of the crucifix.

There would be no harm in it if she prayed that he might be led into a better frame of mind and go home to bed.

But she did not pray, because an idea occurred to her. That evening when she herself went roving and prayed that she might escape unharmed, he had been sent. For it *was* a very strange chance that she should meet him of all persons. And since then everything had gone well with her. But suppose it was intended that things should go well for both of them—that they should preserve each other from worse things.—Well, after all, she would pray that he might be as well protected as she had been, and in return she would promise that if it was intended that they two . . . then she would be submissive. . . .

When, an hour later, she heard the front door open, an inner voice told her that he came home as pure as he had gone out, and with a good resolution she fell asleep smiling.

XXIX. Ecstasy

DAHL had been lying awake and meditating. He had read Mrs. Sonne's little manuscript volume with a feeling that it had been written expressly for him. For a week he had carefully followed its directions without a thought of anything else, and the result was a dryness and an emptiness more inconsolable than he had felt when, in contempt for dogmatic futility, he had abandoned his faith in Christianity and tried to deaden his thoughts with the help of alcohol and women.

Finally a profound contempt for himself had made solitude unbearable, and he had gone to see Barnes and asked him straight out:

"Tell me, Barnes, have you formed any definite opinion about me?"

"Yes, thanks," Barnes had answered, looking at him with a little teasing, critical smile.

"Have you any objection to telling me your opinion?"

"None at all," said Barnes, "but first you ought to do the usual thing when people ask a man his opinion about themselves."

"What is that?" Dahl had asked, and Barnes had answered:

"They usually don't give him time to answer, in their hurry to come out with their own valuable views on the subject."

"My view is that I am an ass," said Dahl.

"That is rather an engaging way of putting it," said Barnes, "and perhaps it is superfluous to ask for your reasons, but all the same——"

"I am religious," said Dahl, "and I am an unbeliever. I don't believe in God, but I constantly feel impelled to pray to him. I read Mrs. Sonne's books on Christian mysticism and thought to myself: Barnes is right! here we have the root of the matter. And yet I didn't know what the root of the matter was; I only had a dim presentiment of it, at times something like a foggy memory, as though I had once lived through it all and forgotten it again. I was given a guide written by the *cappellano*; I read

it and felt that *here was the path to what I was in search of*—although God, Christ and the Holy Ghost were mentioned on every page; and it was not until I found myself getting inwardly arid and empty that my total disbelief in the Holy Trinity became clear to me. How on earth I managed to pass any examination with such a foggy brain is a mystery to me.”

“It’s the old story,” said Barnes. “If a man has a gift for falling in love, his feelings are set in motion by the presence of a beautiful woman, even if he is quite aware of her shallowness. And if a man has a religious disposition, he will be brought into a devotional mood by religious conceptions, even if a new idea of the universe has long since taken their place in his mind. Ah, yes, unrequited religious love is a sign of the times we live in; for Christianity is a simple-minded old woman.

“And you, my friend, are a warm-blooded young man, whether it’s a question of religion or women. I have followed your doings closely—including the time when you were trying to drown the religious instinct in the erotic. You made a damned poor hand of it, and you will never do any better, you will never succeed in becoming religiously impotent. And you may congratulate yourself on that.

“For, if I am right in my view of religious feeling, it is a fundamental power in the world, without which spiritual life would die out.”

“There are some who maintain the contrary,” said Dahl, “and say that it’s a sign of weakness and unhealthiness.”

“I know that very well,” said Barnes, “but it doesn’t impress me. There are some people who draw no distinction between positive religion and religious feeling. I believe I told you once that religious feeling is the individual’s sense of his relation to ‘existence,’ ‘the whole,’ ‘the universe,’ ‘God,’ or whatever you like to call it. And, like the erotic feeling, it is a natural impulse and the same everywhere. I know, of course, that in different countries and different ages spooning and marrying are accompanied by the observance of various formalities, but I expect the result is much the same. It’s quite likely that a European gets on better with a white wife than with a brown one, and feels more comfortable in a Christian church than in a Buddhist temple. But still we constantly find instances of the union of white and brown, European and Buddhist.

“You asked for my opinion about you. In most respects

you are a normally gifted Danish student. But, in addition to that, you are a person of unusual religious gifts, and you live in an age and a country in which religion has lost its significance. You cannot escape from your religious instinct, but whether you will become the founder of a religion, a plain, harmonious individual, or a mystery-monger—or possibly a candidate for an asylum—why, that remains to be seen.”

“Tell me,” said Dahl after a short pause, “the ‘Professor,’ as we called him at home—do you know anything about him?”

“No—o,” Barnes replied; “he’s a sly old fox, that man, but I’m inclined to condemn him on suspicion.”

“Of what?”

“Of having, in his own case, solved the religious problem in a happy—I would almost say, a blessed way. But he keeps his mouth shut and won’t let out the secret. I once tried to tackle him about it. And I flatter myself I’m an impudent dog and have had some practice in dissecting my fellow-creatures. But he just looked at me with a mischievous smile, as though he could see clean through me, until I felt as sheepish as a schoolboy and found myself blushing at something I have never confided to anybody but you.”

“In the days when I lived in ‘the open,’ ” Dahl said, “he once spoke to me as if he knew about it.”

“I shouldn’t be surprised,” replied Barnes. “But with me he was *closed*. I asked my father whether he knew anything about the Professor and his attitude to religion. ‘No,’ said Father, ‘all I know is that his religion is always the one which the person he happens to be talking to is most in need of.’

“And as far as I can make out, he is always quite ready to part with it.” . . .

Next day Dahl was sitting on the sofa with his eyes closed; his breathing began to come slowly and regularly, his consciousness seemed to increase in clearness, though his thoughts were as though paralysed by a deep loathing of everything that was himself. One after another his qualities appeared before him, aroused his disgust, and fell to the ground like withered, worthless leaves.

At last they were stilled, and then he had a feeling of dying away from himself.

Profoundly conscious of his own paltriness, he sank into the

depths of nothingness with a feeling of deliverance, a feeling that he would no longer exist.

His head lay back against the sofa cushion. Anyone coming into the room might have supposed him dead. He noticed himself that he was breathing slowly, deeply, regularly. He also began to notice a happy healthiness in his limbs, like that which one feels when an illness is losing its strength. It increased to a jubilant plenitude of physical delight.

A tear or two trickled down his cheeks, for the physical delight had immediately become transformed into spiritual happiness.

An unspeakable goodness welled like a flood of light through all his being, and he was unable to distinguish between it and himself. He felt himself supported by a loving power, which supported the whole world, held it up and bore it on, so closely united with it that it was impossible to distinguish between life itself and this mighty love.

His feeling of devotion was so profound that he had no thought of kneeling or clasping his hands. But he opened his eyes, impelled thereto by the almost overpowering inner light; and then he saw that the light was outside him as well as within.

The whole room lay in radiant light, which cast no shadow, and which penetrated tables and chairs so that he seemed to see through them. He could not determine whether this all-pervading light was the divine love itself or something belonging to it, as man's body belongs to his soul.

But—as though by the aid of this very light—he saw that the mighty love is always present everywhere.

But that man has succeeded in isolating himself from the consciousness of it by the aid of his self-love. And that no man has any suspicion of the strength of his own self-love.

As near to us as our own breath, and yet so far that we can doubt its existence, is God's love. . . .

Even when old Martha, his landlady, came into the room, she could see the light and thought the place was on fire.

But when she saw it ascend and vanish away, she clasped her hands and bent her white head, and he heard her trustful voice say in quiet awe:

“Was it your mother that was with you? Mercy on us, Mr. Daahl, was it herself you saw?”

She saw by his smile that he was going to answer no, and she made haste to prevent his saying anything ungrateful.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Daahl, you take my word for it, it *was* her. Why, even I could see the light she took with her when she went. And your own face too, it's as pure as if she'd just borne you over again. She's been here and brought you her blessing. I can see it. She's left a holiness behind her. It's only a mother's love that can be like that.

"But it's *yours*, and I'm not going to stop here and disturb you."

She stopped at the door and said awkwardly:

"Only, you see, I promised the little lady in there to ask if you'd come and take tea. Now I'll tell her you can't."

Dahl got up and went to her.

"I shall be glad to come," he said. "She has such a lonely time."

XXX. Reflected Glory

HE had no need to tell Mrs. Sonne what had happened. When he handed her the red volume, he saw by her expression that she knew it.

Even Katharina, who was standing in the middle of the room, felt that there was an understanding between those two in the window, in which she had no part. She saw her mother being gradually transformed into a girl; but a girl whose happy longings had paled into the melancholy of renunciation. A protest arose within her against something indefinite—life or men or God.

She saw her mother take the red volume in her hands as though it were a holy thing. She heard her say, as though admitting him to a secret chamber she was herself unworthy to enter:

“You have experienced it. I know it. I have seen it once before—in another.”

She went to the desk and opened the little compartment that was always locked. Her back was turned to Katharina, who could not see what her mother was doing, until the picture had been carefully placed on the writing-table and Mrs. Sonne had let go of it with her hands, but not with her eyes.

Dahl bent down and examined the *cappellano's* face, in which beauty and piety were so closely united that it was impossible to decide whether this was the picture of a pious soul that had received a revelation of beauty, or a beautiful character that had been intensified by piety.

Katharina stood at a distance looking on. The picture, Mrs. Sonne and Dahl made up a unity in which there was no room for her. At last Dahl raised his head, took his eyes, as though with an effort, from the picture, and asked:

“Where is he living now?”

Mrs. Sonne looked into space.

“I don't know,” she said. “At that time he was a young *cappellano*. I met him in Sorrento and afterwards in Rome. We

saw a great deal of him, my mother and I. Just before we left he entered an order. And since then I have heard nothing of him or from him. This is his handwriting."

She showed Dahl the green Italian volume.

"So you have carried out the exercises he drew up?"

Dahl nodded. He was evidently far away, wrapt in his own thoughts. His expression was introspective; he seemed entirely to have forgotten where he was.

At last he spoke, almost as if addressing himself, but yet in a way that showed he was aware of the presence of others:

"He entered an order—remained in his Church.—Yes, he was a Christian. . . .

"But I am an unbeliever. And yet I have experienced the marvel. God's love is omnipresent—within the Church and without it. Our religious *feeling*, not our faith in doctrines, opens our minds to it. It follows psychological laws——"

Mrs. Sonne attentively watched his handsome, youthful face, which showed at the moment a solemn loftiness far in advance of his years. She saw the soft lines of his mouth grow firm in a resolution before he proceeded:

"To live as a witness that religious feeling *in itself*—even without the conception of a god—opens the mind to the divine love—that is worth living for.

"To find and point out the laws of the growth and development of the religious feeling—this must be the duty of one who, living in an age of unbelief and himself an unbeliever, experiences the felicity of all religions.

He looked up at her and said as one whose thoughts were already outside the door:

"I must ask you to excuse me. I must go now. I feel the need of being alone."

He smiled, to give her at least a kind of explanation:

"You see, I believe at last I've found my line of study."

A little pressure of the hand, a short nod to both, and he was out of the room.

Neither of them had a thought of seeing him out.

"Yes," said Mrs. Sonne thoughtfully, "I'm sure he has found his line of study."

"What is it?" asked Katharina.

Mrs. Sonne left her own thoughts to look at her daughter,

who stood there simply as a young girl who asked a practical question.

"I suppose one would call it—psychology of religion," she said, relapsing into her own life.

"Then what will he *be*?" asked Katharina.

"What will he be?" said Mrs. Sonne within herself, and her face had an expression which made Katharina clench her hand without knowing it.

"What will he be?" Mrs. Sonne repeated, without waking or extricating herself from her thoughts. "I think he will be a blessing to mankind."

"Can he live on that?" asked Katharina brutally.

Her tone tore Mrs. Sonne so violently out of her wandering thoughts that it hurt her. She turned to her daughter with an icy chill in her eyes, which Katharina seemed to know. That look in her mother's eyes was preserved in her memory, but it had not been turned upon her.

But now Mrs. Sonne turned to the *cappellano's* portrait, and Katharina saw in her face the expression that had made her clench her hand when they were talking about Dahl. She approached her mother, and in her attitude, her walk and her voice there was a half-restrained scorn, which again seemed familiar from someone not herself.

"Mother—are you quite sure you weren't in love with that—priest?"

The word "priest" especially seemed to her like a ghost going through the room.

Mrs. Sonne gave a start and a faint blush showed in her cheeks.

But she quickly laid hold of her maternal dignity—a little exaggerated in her haste—she looked as if her shoes had suddenly been given high heels.

"One does not fall in love with such men as he," she said. "They themselves have no worldly feelings and do not arouse them in others."

"Oh, don't they?" said Katharina. "Do you know what it is? It's *hysterics*. Lies and hysterics!"

Mrs. Sonne looked in alarm at her daughter, standing defiantly before her.

"Katharina," she said after a pause, "you must watch your-

self. You are so excitable that I am sometimes afraid of what may become of you. You have inherited your father's temperament."

"Thank God," said Katharina, taking up Captain Sonne's portrait from the writing-table.

"Yes, you're like your father," said Mrs. Sonne, as she studied the lines of her face.

"I'm proud of it," said Katharina, upsetting the *cappellano* as she replaced the captain on the table.

After that she walked to her room with head erect.

When there, she stood looking out over the lake and tears came into her eyes. . . .

Ever since his ecstatic experience Dahl had had a feeling of being surrounded by an invisible but living atmosphere. It was as though a remnant of the mighty love which at that moment had made the air luminous were still within him and lay about him as a gentle, profound sympathy, which had no regard for persons, but shone like a ray of sunlight through everyone he met.

When he left Mrs. Sonne with the firm resolution to devote his life to the service of the mighty, omnipresent love, his will became closely united with it, and he suddenly felt within himself a psychic force, the strength of which almost terrified him.

He had no doubt that, with the aid of the living atmosphere which surrounded him, he could control the minds of men.

In fact, he felt certain that if in his thoughts he raised a wall in front of that tall lady with the grey hat who was walking four or five yards in front of him, she would be unable to move a step farther.

And at that moment he did it, really without reflection, but simply intoxicated by the power of his will.

And it actually was so. The lady stopped abruptly, as though she had hit against something. Her whole body swayed helplessly, but she could not get on.

Then he let go his hold of the "wall" he had set up in front of her; she moved forward, looked round in bewilderment, and walked on.

He himself stood still, a man ran into him and was abusive, but

he paid no attention. Now he could scarcely believe what he had himself seen and done. Only when the "miracle" had happened did he begin to doubt it.

He could still see the lady ahead of him. But something within warned him not to attempt it a second time.

XXXI. A "Psychical Investigator"

"**Y**OU don't mind a couple of people coming in this evening?" said Nanna Bang, when Dahl came in to tea. "It's only my cousin, Mr. Adolf Quist, and his wife. They looked in at the shop this afternoon and said they'd be here at tea-time.—Ah, there's the bell."

She slipped out into the hall, and Dahl heard a gentle woman's voice and a man's organ that swelled with its owner's satisfaction.

Miss Bang introduced them. Dahl had seen the lady's face and figure somewhere or other; in fact, he knew them so well that he was surprised to find no sign of recognition in her. He had no time to think where he could have met her, as Mr. Quist immediately displayed all his conversational talents full in his face.

Adolf Quist was a very talkative man, with a rooted belief that words were the same as wisdom. He knew a lot, but his knowledge had no grounding; strictly speaking, it consisted solely in his own conviction of it. His nimble inquisitiveness extracted the juice from everything that came within range of his consciousness and dumped the husks of fact into the storehouse of his excellent memory.

He had been good-looking, but the mirror had exchanged his looks for the consciousness of them. Nanna Bang liked him, because he had always been "not only amusing but *good*." Probably he might really have become the excellent person she considered him, if he had not for years limited his intellectual nutriment to the most vitamin-less *revue* ditties and newspaper articles.

When he had sufficiently aired his own admirable attractions, he brought forward his wife, though Nanna Bang had already introduced her. She was a tall and showy woman, as was fit and proper in the wife of Adolf Quist.

He seemed to grow smaller when he stood beside his wife. Dahl regarded the couple with wonder. There was something ludicrously illogical in their relationship. He was vexed that he

hadn't Barnes's power of "thinking for himself." The mutual relations of these two people interested him.

But, at any rate, he had a *sense* of them, and there was no doubt that Quist was the inferior. At the same time, it was obvious that he was the master. Quist regarded his wife with a swell of pride; she looked at her husband indulgently, with a trace of weariness, but it was certain that she always did what he wished. Quist's face beamed with fondness; his wife's mouth had a touch of grey resignation.

She nevertheless gave the impression of being possessed by a deep inner happiness which was connected in some way with her husband and explained the fact of her continually submitting to him, although she had long known him in and out.

Dahl was struck by her face, which seemed to have so much soul in it; a soul that had been rather laid by, it was true, and for which nobody had any particular use. The expressive mouth was suggestive not only of strong emotions but of a knowledge that life, after all, had nothing but homely fare to offer. The blue-grey eyes were strangely observant, as though always prepared to receive orders; their sensitiveness seemed exaggerated.

When Nanna Bang asked after "little Ingeborg," a deep light came into them, which showed where Mrs. Quist's life was centred. And Quist was little Ingeborg's father; that was a dignity he could never fritter away.

"But now you must really sit down," said Nanna Bang. Quist at once found an arm-chair; his wife was going to sit on the piano stool, but Nanna Bang dashed forward with a scream. Mrs. Quist jumped up and looked around in bewilderment.

As soon as Dahl saw her looking about with no notion of what was happening, he recognized her.

It was the tall lady in the grey hat, whom he had forced to stand still in the middle of the street the day before.

The piano stool was broken, Nanna Bang explained, but Alvilda could sit on the sofa beside Dahl.

By the way in which she seated herself close to him, he felt that she took not the slightest interest in his presence. He was just an ordinary young sprout, which would one day grow into an equally unimportant twig.

After tea Mrs. Quist began to talk to Nanna Bang about little Ingeborg, but Quist was a man of wider interests. He confided to Dahl that he was a psychical investigator. Of course he

was much too enlightened to be a Christian. Jesus was an epileptic, you know, but Crookes and Wallace were men of science, and table-legs were full of intelligence.

Fraudulent mediums, did Mr. Dahl say? No doubt, but they were the professional ones, who *had* to keep up their reputation. No, you have to have private, unpaid mediums. He was himself engaged in training one—his wife, in fact. Now Mr. Dahl should see.

Mrs. Alvilda had to leave the room. She did it reluctantly, but without objection. It succeeded admirably; she found the things Nanna had hidden and said what Mr. Dahl had been thinking about. Quist was right, she was very receptive of thought-transference. But then he was training her scientifically and making notes of her progress. They were to be published later: "A Medium's Development."

Mrs. Quist had resumed her seat on the sofa and begun to talk about little Ingeborg. It suited her so well, Dahl thought. But Quist had an idea. He insisted on Dahl thinking of a number and making Mrs. Alvilda say what it was. Quist could see by his eyes that he had "suggestive powers."

Dahl saw she was disinclined and wanted to refuse, but when she turned her receptive look upon him he was seized with the sense of power which sometimes overwhelmed him and plunged his eyes, full of will-force, into hers, which were so mild and yielding.

Quist got up and signed to Nanna Bang to keep motionless. His wife turned pale, Quist took out his watch, Nanna was scared. Dahl was gazing into Mrs. Quist's pupils and had entirely forgotten that he was to think of a number, for as he stared into the depths of her eyes her personal attributes vanished. Mrs. Alvilda Quist, with her name and address, her education and her experience, disappeared as totally as if she had been dead and buried, and what was left was something imperishable, a "life" or an "instinct," which seemed to be directed towards a definite end, a "life" which had an *object*. With a feeling approaching fear, he was spying about for this object, when he suddenly had a palpitation, like a sleeper roused too abruptly: something had touched his hand.

It was her hand, which had been lying on the edge of the table and had now fallen, dead and heavy, upon his.

She started up, put her hand to her heart, stared at him in

alarm, dropped her eyes again, and hid her face in her hands.

Quist leaned across the table eagerly.

"Keep on! Look at him, Alvilda! Keep on, Mr. Dahl! We were just going to get a trance. It's the first time. Try again!"

But Mrs. Alvilda shook her head decidedly.

"No, I won't. I *daren't*. I'm frightened. I won't see it again!"

Quist took out his note-book. This was something new.

"What did you see? Be quick, before it's gone."

Mrs. Alvilda made an effort. Quist began to write.

"I can't explain it—I saw Mr. Dahl with nothing on——"

Quist dropped his pencil.

"With—what do you say——?"

"I mean—his body seemed like a suit of clothes he could take off, so that I could see *himself*—oh, it's so uncanny! It is such a terrible responsibility to be alive!"

"How responsibility?" asked Quist, who had found his pencil again.

Nanna Bang clasped her hands and looked at Dahl, whose eyes hung upon Mrs. Quist with a strangely scared look.

"Responsibility towards—towards what we are *designed* for," said Mrs. Alvilda. "I won't think of it any more."

She passed her hand over her eyes as though to brush away the vision.

"Just tell us whether you saw anything of this design." He asked, not for the sake of the "design," but in the cause of science.

His wife gazed before her with a petrified expression which made them all wait breathlessly.

"Yes," she said at last, "I saw what Mr. Dahl was designed for. But I have no words to say what it was—no, I can't even remember it." She breathed a sigh of relief. "It's gone. I only have a kind of feeling."

Quist looked at Dahl over his note-book and forgot to write, for Dahl looked as if he knew himself what she had seen.

Dahl's and Mrs. Alvilda's oppressive seriousness infected Nanna. "I don't think we ought to do such things," she said. "And the Bible forbids it."

"The Bible's out of date," said Quist.

Mrs. Alvilda wanted to go home to Ingeborg.

"It's taken it out of her," Quist whispered to Dahl. "We'll look in at a variety show on the way. It'll amuse her."

He helped her on with her cloak and joked about the price of her clothes. "You don't know what it costs to be married, Mr. Dahl, especially if, like myself, you think a woman ought to carry out the scheme right through."

He looked at his wife in a way which showed it was not so much the exuberance of her feeling as the luxuriance of her person that delighted him.

When Nanna Bang was left alone her eyes sought the Crucified, whom Adolf with his scientific mind had called an epileptic.

She shuddered and took her rosary from the crucifix, held it in her hand for a moment; she had not liked to wear it for fear of what the others would say in the shop.

Now she resolutely hung it round her neck.

XXXII. Delirium

AUTUMN had laid its tints on the trees by the lake; the water lay calm and silvery white.

Barnes stopped and breathed in the sharp freshness of October in draughts as deep as his lungs could stand.

"What would I give to be in the garden at home and to put a dewy flower into my mouth!" he said.

Dahl smiled but made no answer; his thoughts were still on what they had been talking about.

The sound of galloping hoofs on the soft riding-track awoke him. A lady and gentleman came tearing towards them, their horses snorting with delight at the pace. The lady was Katharina Sonne; she saw them and nodded as she passed. They took off their hats, and Barnes forgot to put his on again: he stood staring after the riders with his hat in his hand.

"Oh!" he said, as he put on his hat, clenched his hands, and stretched out his arms like a man who had just got up.

"Did you see her?" he said. "Did you see her as they came? Did you see how her eyes and the horse's had agreed to have a good time? It was a shame that she recognized us and changed into a woman. Before she caught sight of us she was only a child having a romping-game with a horse. Look at her back, how it swings! Is the gallop in it or in her mount? Nobody knows, except her and the horse. She is Captain Sonne's daughter right enough!"

"Who is the man she's riding with?" asked Dahl.

"He?" said Barnes with slight irritation, as though at being interrupted. "That's Nedergaard, a manufacturer, an old friend of her father. They are his horses. Look how stiffly he sits, the old boy. There's not much wrong with his knees though. I'd give something to be able to ride half as well as he!"

"Ride!" said Dahl. "Do *you* want to ride?"

There was nothing in Barnes's greyish complexion and frail figure to indicate a desire for any form of exercise.

"Want to?" repeated Barnes. "It seems to me—just now,

at any rate—that it's far more useful and important to be able to ride than to take one's M.A. in English."

Dahl smiled to himself, but Barnes caught him and exclaimed: "You think I'm in love with Katharina. Don't be so sure of that. Maybe I am in love, but possibly not with her. Maybe it is with her and nobody else, but then perhaps it isn't love, but more likely affectionate envy.

"What a couple of softies we are, you and I! Here we've been spoiling this glorious morning with our metaphysical ruminations. And then a young girl comes racing along, a girl with red blood in her veins, right down to her finger-nails, making them into rose-leaves. She doesn't worry herself about death or the riddle of the universe any more than the animal she's riding.

"The riddle of the universe! And I can't solve it anyhow. But I'm not strong enough to climb up on the back of her horse if it was standing still, and it would cost me my life if it started to run with me."

He stopped and gazed after the riders, who had reached the far end of the road and were disappearing at a walk as they turned the corner.

Who was it he looked like? Where was it Dahl had seen that look of longing? He mused over it with his eyes on Barnes, but that only disturbed his memory. He gave up trying to remember, but the moment he took his eyes off Barnes's face it was gone, leaving nothing but the longing look in the eyes of another.

Tine's! That was how she used to stand gazing into the far distance at anything beautiful. He had a sudden feeling that, in spite of all their confidences, there was a deep gulf between Barnes and him, and Barnes's next words emphasized it clearly:

"You have learnt that God is love, you have experienced the divine love in such a way that you could almost take hold of it and feel it. I suppose I ought to bow down in the dust before you and rejoice in your experience while envying you. And perhaps I do. At any rate, I envy you your handsome face and your good physique.

"Divine love! A healthy human love appeals to me more and seems to me more wonderful. That God loves his creatures, even such a one as I, well, that ought to be a matter of course

for gods. But if a *human being*, still more a fresh and healthy *woman*, could love me, I should feel it as a miracle and accept it as such."

Dahl did not answer. Not until they had arrived at the gate of the college did he say slowly:

"A 'healthy human *love*' is—a lie. It is instinct in disguise. Nothing else.

"I once knew a young woman—the first to reveal 'woman' to me—and I possessed her in a happy intoxication. I was not thinking much about the woman *herself*, but the intoxication was deep. Now she is married, and has children, whom she loves—well, I'm sure she's fond of her husband too. But I have met her since, and I tell you, I could have taken her as she stood there among all those she loved—because her *instinct* pointed to me."

"Then it must be you she loves," said Barnes.

"Loves!" repeated Dahl. "Do I love her? I know perfectly well I don't, and yet I sometimes think I shall never be rid of her. There are moments when I am tempted to go straight to the railway station, make for her home, and take her in my arms, though I know it would ruin her life with her children and their father."

"But if you abstain from doing it," said Barnes, "isn't that precisely from love of her?"

"No," answered Dahl, "it's from *fear of acting wrongly*."

"And then all the others that I knew, at the time I was leading a loose life—don't you think I felt, at any rate, sympathy for them, so long as I was impelled towards them? And what was it after all!

"And she, whose nature I am condemned to see in every young woman——"

"Then you love her," Barnes interrupted.

"I hate her, if anything," said Dahl, "for destroying my harmony with my own inmost nature. I can only live happily in the state of pure innocence which was Lillebror's and mine."

"You are grown up now," said Barnes.

"Do you think that's an obstacle?" retorted Dahl. "Isn't that pure innocence still alive in me as my own inmost nature? The sexual impulse is its worst enemy, and that I have learnt to fear and abhor, whether it shows itself in its naked coarseness or in the ravishing disguise of love."

"I believe I understand you," said Barnes. "I myself was a celestial blue inside, one summer day. It didn't last long. And now my hopes are a more earthly green. But do you intend to avoid every woman you meet on earth?"

"Yes; I have seen another love," said Dahl. "And it brooks no rival."

Barnes looked down at the pavement. Then he gave a little laugh which Dahl had heard before on an examination day, when Barnes thought his Latin translation was no good, and was suddenly told it was the best.

"I can't help liking you, Dahl," he said. "And it isn't only because you're happily mad."

"And if your madness should end in wisdom, if the religious feeling should help you to find the philosopher's stone and found a new and good religion, then I will be the first of your disciples in the ranks."

"But now I must go in and do some work."

He ran in through the gate, and Dahl walked slowly home.

He had not been sitting many minutes when old Martha came in with a tray.

"I thought you might like a drop of coffee," she said. "May I sit and watch you drink it? I badly want something nice to look at after all the devilry in there."

She gave a toss of the head in the direction of the opposite room. Dahl asked if there was anything special the matter.

"Why, don't you know? Don't you know that Crooked Susanna, as Miss Bang calls her—and crooked she is, too—that she's taken ill?"

"Is it serious?" asked Dahl.

Old Martha looked at him rather sceptically.

"Can't you guess what it is? You must have seen that she drank!"

"Then is it——"

"Yes, it's the horrors. She gets wild at times. She's knocked out three or four of her sister's teeth, and she was deaf to start with, and now she can't chew either. And then the things she says! You wouldn't think a person could have so much filth in her mouth. When the fits come on her, I mean. And then she gets so angry, you never saw! I sometimes think it must be the devil himself that's shaking her up, it gives me such a

turn. Would you like to look at her? She's quiet just now. But finish your coffee in peace first."

Soon after, they went together to the room where "Crooked Susanna" lay in a doze and did not notice them at first.

"No, it don't smell nice," said old Martha. "She won't let us open the window. She says the other one can't bear it."

"The other one?"

"Yes, it's somebody that goes for her and that she's mortally afraid of. It's when 'the other one' comes that the trouble begins."

Crooked Susanna opened her eyes.

"The other one's gone," she said.

"Deaf Anna" had seen Dahl go in and now came herself, curious to know what he might have to say. She was flustered as usual, held her hand before her toothless mouth, and uttered her embarrassed "Ho-ho," a mixture of obsequious laughter and anything she might be expected to say when she hadn't heard a word.

Crooked Susanna looked at her damaged mouth.

"It was the other one that did it," she said sorrowfully. "You d—don't think I should do a thing like that to my own s—sister?"

"Ho-ho," nodded Deaf Anna, who only knew that something had been said to her, but dared not bring her ears any nearer.

"Who is the other one?" asked Dahl cautiously.

Crooked Susanna looked at him a moment and then answered confidentially:

"It's somebody that comes and tries to drive me out of myself. She says there isn't room for me in me, because it's her that's going to be me. She says she's a woman, but after what she's been trying to do to me, I believe she's a man."

"Hush, hush," said old Martha, wagging her hand, "don't let's talk about that."

"Yes, but she does," insisted Crooked Susanna; "it's downright——"

Old Martha drowned the word by blowing her nose vigorously.

"Come away," she said to Dahl. "It's a shame to listen to the things she says in all innocence."

"It's a sad thing to see what she's come to," she said out in the passage. "And she was once such a sweet and good little thing. If her nurse hadn't gone and dropped her and made

a cripple of her, perhaps she might have been a decent sober body. Ah, life isn't all it might be!"

Before Dahl had reached his room or Martha her kitchen, Deaf Anna came shouting:

"Auntie, Auntie!"

"There, bless my soul," sighed the old woman, "if it hasn't come back again!"

She trotted into the bedroom and Dahl followed her.

Crooked Susanna was writhing on her bed; her arms jerked spasmodically, her shoulders jumped up and down, her face was transformed and uglier, she looked older and full of suppressed spitefulness. For a while it seemed as if she was resisting and trying to defend her reason, but all at once she gave in, and with a bound, incredible in its elasticity, she stood upright on her bed.

"Goodness me, don't look at her, Mr. Daahl!" said old Martha. "She wants washing, but we haven't been able to get at her."

It was a sad trial for Deaf Anna, who had some leanings towards piety and went to church every Sunday, though she couldn't hear a word and simply sat watching the parson. She blushed and was ashamed to look at Dahl or at her sister, because of his presence, or even at her aunt, because she might have asked her to look after Crooked Susanna, and she couldn't do that when there was a man in the room.

She danced about in bashful perplexity, but suddenly made a dash for the bed and shouted, as though her sister was as deaf as herself:

"Lie down, Susanna! Lie down at once!"

The crooked one sang, not from gaiety but from spite, to increase her sister's confusion:

"Joachim of Babylon, he had a wife Susanna——"

"Ah," sighed the aunt, "she may well say Babylon! Lord save us! There now!"

Deaf Anna had come too near. With a strength and accuracy worthy of a boxer, Susanna hit her in the eye.

"Poor soul," said old Martha, "she won't have one of her senses left to her!"

She put her arm round the deaf niece and led her to the door.

"No, I durstn't leave her," she shouted. "You go into the

kitchen and bathe it in cold water.—The wretch!" She shook her fist at the figure on the bed.

But Dahl's pity had deserted the victim for the assailant. He recalled her humility and remorse over her sister's teeth: "It wasn't me, it was the other one."

A will—which seemed to come from something outside himself—to see Crooked Susanna made peaceable and humble and good again, caused him to advance towards her.

The old aunt shouted a warning:

"Don't you go too near, Mr. Daahl! They have the strength of three when they're out of their senses."

He could not understand his deep sympathy for Crooked Susanna, he only felt it and followed it. But this very sympathy seemed to arouse the cripple's fury.

"Get away!" she shrieked, and her eyes shone with hate. He meekly received their exasperated look in his own. And then began a battle, eye against eye, without either of the combatants moving a muscle.

Old Martha stared at them with an uncanny feeling that the struggle was between forces from the world of spirits.

"If only his mother would help him," she sighed piously.

It seemed that the cripple had become a clairvoyante and read his thoughts.

"You think you're sent by God," she cried to Dahl, "but you're a devil, that's what you are!"

He scarcely heard her words, but he felt her thoughts. All his psychic powers were directed upon her in a concentration so close that he positively felt his own mind wrestling with hers and sensed as though by contact, every vibration of it. It appeared to him that their bodies stood open and exposed them to influences, evil and good, from a hyperphysical world. Perhaps he was not far from being as mad as Crooked Susanna, whose excitement infected him, but he was the stronger and he could feel her power of resistance weakening.

Just as he thought it was broken, she sprang up with a bound and pointed out into the room without taking her eyes off him, laughing with satisfaction.

"You think you've won! But it's only for a time. There's one waiting for you. One of the black ones yonder. He won't do it yet. He says it's too soon. But he'll get you. It won't be God, it'll be the devil that takes you!"

At that instant he believed himself that he had lost his reason, for he thought he saw everything the cripple described. There *was* a black figure standing where she pointed; he did not see it but knew that it was there. It transmitted a current of poisonous power to the cripple, and through her it penetrated him and paralysed his soul and his body; in a moment he would behave exactly like her.

He heard old Martha's voice:

"Our Father, which art in heaven, deliver us from evil!"

The old prayer, which he had so often repeated when he was afraid and had to sleep alone in the dark, touched something helplessly innocent deep within him. He was nothing, could do nothing, but had a strong desire to be good and be saved. He had a feeling like one waking from a nightmare.

Susanna was still standing there, Susanna who was ill. An infinite goodness descended upon him, as though from above. If only she might be herself again! He had no thought of compelling her, was simply filled with goodness for her; it could not even have been his own goodness: it was much better than he.

The cripple stared at him. The look of hate became one of wonder, the wonder changed to shyness, the shyness to a feeling of shame; she lay down and crept under the bed-clothes. But she continued to look up at Dahl, and gradually her eyes cleared.

The aunt went up to her and asked in a low voice:

"Do you feel better?"

The cripple gave her a friendly look.

"It was Mr. Dahl th—that helped me," she said; "he m—made it go away." . . .

She acquired a firm belief in Dahl. Whenever she began to be afraid of "the other one," she asked her aunt to go and fetch Dahl. When he came and sat in her room, she felt calm.

But one day she had fever, her temperature rose rapidly, and before they knew where they were, Crooked Susanna was cold for ever.

Old Martha came into Dahl's room and told him.

"Well, now she's dead," she said, drying her eyes; "she won't have to struggle any more.

"It's strange when I think of the time she was alive—it seems like it was all wasted. A queer changeling she's been all her days, except just when she was a little girl, and then the last

week of her life. It was just as if we knew her again as she was when she was little. She was so meek and mild, and she made us do all the things she wouldn't hear of before. She asked to be washed all over, and she was too. But it's my belief it was that that killed her. For I must tell you—but you won't tell anybody else, will you?—just as we were scrubbing and scouring her, she took it into her head that the window must be opened, and nothing would please her till Deaf Anna went and opened it, more's the pity.

“For it's my firm belief that Susanna got too much fresh air and washing all at once and that's what she died of. For, you see, it was inflammation of the lungs that killed her, the doctor said.

“Well, it was the best thing for her to be taken away from us. Only it's a pity it couldn't have waited till the colour had gone out of her sister's eye; for it won't do for her to go to the funeral looking like that. . . .

“But *you*, Mr. Daahl, you've been chosen by our Lord to do some good in the world; I've known that ever since the day when your mother came to see you. And it was you that drove the evil spirit out of the poor crippled girl, so that she could die in peace like her own self.” . . .

The belief that he was chosen was not strange to Dahl; the events of his life seemed to confirm it.

But he had begun to feel tired and empty, as though his spiritual surplus was exhausted. He awaited a recurrence of the ecstasy, but it did not come. His longing to feel the blissful joy in his heart and to see it reflected in his face became more and more ardent. At last he resumed the *cappellano's* exercises with impatient zeal.

XXXIII. Divorce

HELEN URUP sat at her window looking over the square.

There stood Frederik VII and sail-maker Berg. There was nothing else.

She went on with her embroidery and looked again.

Still the same empty square.

She bent over her embroidery, which was turning out quite nicely. Her mother was to have it.

There was a sound of steps out in the square. Country steps evidently, not quite on good terms with the paving-stones. She looked again.

It was Peter Murer, pretty Tine's husband. He walked slowly with bent head, stopped outside the doctor's door, took his hat off, scratched his head, put his hat on again, walked back past Helen's windows, turned and trudged with loitering steps up to the doctor's door, stood still, took his courage in both hands, and went in.

There was somebody with the doctor. Peter sat in the waiting-room, got tired of sitting still, stood up and took a few paces, but the room was too small, sat down again and began to sweat with waiting.

At last it was his turn.

"Are you ill?" asked the doctor.

No, there was nothing wrong with Peter.

"It's my wife," he said. "But she doesn't know I'm here."

"What's the matter with her?"

Peter raised his eyes shamefacedly and looked at the doctor in shy dejection.

"She's melancholy," he said.

"Do you mean that she is mentally deranged?" asked the doctor.

"No, not exactly deranged," said Peter, "but just what you'd call—*melancholy*."

How did it show itself?

"Why, this way: she's lost her spirits and keeps on brooding to herself. And once or twice I've seen that she's been crying."

Peter's voice grew thick when he said "crying," and he had to swallow once or twice before he could go on:

"There are some days when she looks as if she was downright afraid of me. I can't make it out at all, because I've never done anything to her."

"Do you want me to come and look at her?" asked the doctor.

Peter hesitated a little; but if he couldn't get a piece of advice without it——

"That'll be the best way, I suppose," he said. "But be a little careful about saying it was me that asked you. Couldn't you have met me by accident and asked after her, like?"

Yes, the doctor could do that, and would call when he was passing.

Soon after, Helen heard Peter's step passing the window again.

If only she could get the embroidery finished for her mother's birthday! Her mother was still the central point in her life.

There was strangely little of a married look about Helen. She had just the same face as when she was quite a young girl, except that the expectant look had vanished. When she was married she was still in bud, but just ready to burst out, like a beech on the approach of spring. It only wants something to happen in the weather, and the miracle is there. But perhaps the something does not come, and then you have to wait. Still nothing happens, spring has gone somewhere else, and at last you forget to expect the miracle; there can't be anything after all.

Helen looked again across the square. Berg and Frederik VII were in their places. There was nothing else.

It was a shame they had moved the old time-worn pump; now there was nothing left but paving-stones.

It was getting on for dinner-time. Urup must be home soon—that is, if he was coming.

He came. He was in deep thought, chattered volubly, then dropped into silence, pulled himself together, went on chattering, and made many local jokes.

"By the way, I've got to have a talk with you," he said suddenly in the middle of it all; "but it can wait till we're having our coffee."

Then he fell silent and thought things over.

He had inherited his father's business and also his habits. He was a devil for girls. He knew no qualms of conscience. In a town like this a man *had* to take to something, and for his part he preferred women to the bottle. But that didn't mean he objected to taking a drop with the girl. Of course all this had nothing to do with Helen. It was not the wife's business.

But now he'd taken up with the daughter of Mortensen of the cigar-shop, and she was a regular devil of a girl. She had it all in her, all the others rolled into one. But she'd got the confounded idea into her head that she wanted to be married. Without that it was all off. And as mistress of the house, and that sort of thing, he preferred Helen. But what was he to do? A girl like Mortensen's daughter was not one to let slip—especially in such a hole of a town, and, above all, he was—most decidedly—not going to let anybody else snap her up.

And now he had to ask Helen what she thought about getting a divorce.

Divorce?! Helen didn't understand a word of it. Whatever for?

Perhaps she thought they had an amusing time?

Amusing——? N—o.

“Well, then, are you fond of me?” He couldn't deny himself the small satisfaction of hearing it, though it was unwise just at the moment.

“Fond of you?” Helen thought for a moment. “Why, you're my husband.”

He was a little disappointed, but consoled himself with the thought that there couldn't be so many obstacles to the divorce as he had feared.

But supposing he were not her husband, did she think she would be any less happy on that account?

Helen had really never thought about that and didn't intend to now either. If one was married, one was married, and one had no business to be criticizing and wondering whether it was better to be married or not.

Yes, but now he insisted on her thinking about it.

So Helen dutifully went home to her mother and told her.

Bjerg the lottery-collector was there, but there was no harm in Uncle Hans' hearing it.

“Do you want to get rid of him?” he asked.

Helen looked at him in surprise.

"No," she said. It shot out of her mouth as a matter of course.

"Then keep him," said Bjerg. "He can't get a divorce without your consent."

Helen went home and said she wouldn't.

Urup went to see Clara Mortensen.

"She won't," he said.

"Then good-bye," said Clara.

"Wait till to-morrow," said Urup.

Then he went home to Helen and said he'd been outrageously unfaithful to her.

It was a minute or two before Helen really understood what he meant.

"Have you been—unfaithful to me?" she said at last, with a mixture of surprise and doubt.

"Oh, damn it all," said Urup, "are you a perfect idiot? Haven't you guessed it?"

She shook her head.

"Then, by Jove, you're the only person in the town that hasn't," said Urup. "But now you know it—will you have a divorce now?"

Well, this was another matter. In case of infidelity one did get a divorce. It was evidently the only thing to do.

Urup hurried to Clara Mortensen.

"My word, she's a queer specimen," he said. "She didn't turn a hair when she heard I'd deceived her, but I'd no sooner said it than she was ready for a divorce."

Helen had not had the slightest inkling of her husband's infidelity. Her mother's bringing-up had taken good effect. What she ought not to see, she did not see. Well protected by her own innocence, she had seen nothing at home as a child, and it no more occurred to her to doubt Urup's fidelity than it would have done to think ill of her own mother; and as she had no women friends, there was nobody to enjoy the pleasure of opening her eyes.

But now she had to go home once more with this fresh piece of news.

Her mother started to talk in a velvety way: she "didn't think, after all——," "one might overlook——," and really one had more influence over a man when he'd been guilty——

But here she came up against her own scrupulous bringing-up of her daughter.

Helen was not to be shaken. For it was not a question of forgiveness. Urup did not repent, he intended to go on as he was doing. She knew all about his life now. And Uncle Hans knew all about it too, she could see that.

Then Uncle Hans undertook to arrange the affair in such a way that Helen would not be imposed upon.

Urup wriggled and tried to get off cheaper, but could not get over the fact that there would be no divorce without his wife's consent. And Bjerg "represented" Helen. But he was willing to accept either a divorce in the courts for infidelity or separation on account of incompatibility of temper.

No, leave it at separation; that ran its course without any fuss.

Bjerg came back to Helen's mother with excellent terms for a separation and got his reward.

Helen would have preferred to go home to her old room with the window looking on to the harbour; but both Bjerg and her mother thought that, now her eyes were beginning to be opened, they might easily be too keen. Helen was given her own little flat to live in, down near the harbour, with a view over the friendly sound.

Although she had no need to trouble about ways and means, she took a place in the office of the biggest lawyer in the town. Day after day she went to and from her work unchanged in her girlish nature and purity of mind. In her leisure she lived her own quiet life—a fine and delicate little flower growing undisturbed among refuse-heaps.

XXXIV. Melancholy

DR. LOHSE had been to look at Tine. With irreproachable diplomacy he had explained to her that in conversation at the garden-gate Peter had happened to remark that her spirits were "low," so he had thought he might as well look in. If it was a case of an illness coming on, it was best to take it in time.

Yes, that might be quite right, thought Tine, but that was all Lohse got out of her.

"Well," he said to Peter, "I'm hanged if I know any more than when I came. If she won't say anything, why—— At any rate, there's nothing wrong with her physically, that's certain. But she *is* melancholy, that's clear, and there's something in her look which *might* mean that her mind—h'm—might become unbalanced. We must try to get her to say what it is that troubles her. As she keeps me, a stranger, altogether at a distance, it can't very well be religious scruples or anything of that sort; but perhaps *you* could get her to talk. Try it and then come and see me. And see about keeping her amused."

"Do you think there's a danger of downright insanity?" asked Peter anxiously.

"It depends what you call danger," said Lohse. "Nothing actually impending, you needn't be afraid of that. If I take it seriously, it is only because I hate seeing a young and healthy woman filling her head with fancies. Weeds must be rooted up in time, in a human mind just as much as in a garden. Talk to her and find out, and then we'll soon get the sick look out of her eyes."

"Then she *is* sick?" thought Peter in alarm, trying to spy out how much lay behind the doctor's words.

And when he began to examine her closely, he could himself see the sick look in her eyes, and after a fortnight's vain struggle to win her confidence, it appeared also in his own. His fear that her melancholy might develop into real insanity kept him awake at night, and at last, in a long night of brooding, the de-

spairing truth dawned on him that he was suffering from hopeless love for his wife.

Next morning he put on his best clothes to go to town and see the doctor. The word "specialist" ran in his head; he would ask Dr. Lohse if he ought to take her to Copenhagen to see one.

As it happened, he had promised the Professor to go and repair a hen-house that day, but now he couldn't wait any longer before seeing the doctor. He asked Tine to go across and tell the Professor he couldn't come till the next day, he had important business in town. . . .

The Professor was basking in the March sunshine; he kicked the hen-house with the toe of his boot and wondered why the mischief Peter Murer couldn't keep his promise.

Then the garden-gate clicked, and Tine came in with her eyes on the ground and a mechanical step, as though her soul was far away and had left her body to walk in its sleep.

When the Professor greeted her she looked up with an expression which seemed to say: "Well, here I am"; whereupon she tried to think what she had come for. She found it, and her eyes became quite awake as she gave Peter's message of excuse.

Well, that would be all right, said the Professor, and then there was no more to be said; but evidently Tine didn't quite know how to leave the garden again. There seemed to be something she wanted, and yet didn't *quite* want, or perhaps *couldn't*.

But he could give her time and see what would happen.

"What do you say to a cup of coffee, now you're here?" the Professor asked.

"Thanks," said Tine.

And so they went indoors. Tine sat at the table thinking, while the Professor warmed the coffee, chatted, and brought out cups.

"There you are."

Tine stirred her cup.

"When Peter comes to-morrow," she said suddenly, "couldn't you say something to him from me?"

"Yes, I could," the Professor answered willingly, refusing to wonder at the roundabout way.

Tine stirred her cup and drew a deep breath.

"The Urups have been separated," she said absently.

The Professor knew this well enough, but he feigned surprise to get Tine to talk and say what she knew about it.

She did so and concluded her tale by saying, without any transition:

"What I want you to say to Peter to-morrow is whether he will agree to our being divorced. I can't ask him this myself, when he's there looking at me and feeling sorry about it," she added, when he said neither yes nor no.

"N—o," admitted the Professor slowly, "of course you can't—if you're fond of him."

His eyes searched Tine's face, but there was nothing that protested against his assumption that she was fond of Peter.

"Well, I'll talk to Peter about it," he said.

"Thanks," said Tine.

"You're forgetting your coffee," said the Professor.

"Thanks," said Tine, and took a sip.

The Professor got up, took a cigar, and walked slowly up and down at the far end of the room. Tine sat by herself at the table.

For a while no other sound was heard but the Professor's step; at last his voice came from the corner, with a note of reflection:

"But now I think it would be best if I could persuade Peter that it's the best arrangement for both of you. For it isn't going to please him."

"No," said Tine at the table.

Again the sound of the Professor's step, and then came his voice once more:

"It would be best if I knew something of your reasons—not because I need tell him of them—but to give me an idea of what to say to him."

"It's because I'm not worthy of him," said Tine.

"Wha—at?"

"I sin against him every day."

She bent her head over her coffee-cup and did not see the Professor's look of whimsical doubt, but she heard the candid admission in his voice:

"Ah—of course you can't get on.—What do you mean by—sin?"

"I think about someone else," she said softly.

The Professor observed her from his corner.

The sun fell upon her face, but the shadow of the window-frame was over her eyes with their long black lashes. She had not the look of a peasant girl. She had become one with the beauty, at once clear and dreamy, of the scenery amid which

they all lived without really being aware of it. It was impossible to detach her from it. It surrounded her with a gleam of poetry in witness that she could never be vulgarized.

"This other one," said the Professor, "is he a nice man—an *educated* man, I mean?"

He waited anxiously for the answer, for it appeared to him both natural and incredible that it should be so.

Tine nodded.

The Professor began to walk again.

"And then you would marry him?" he asked.

Tine drew herself up sharply.

"No," she said firmly. She felt the Professor's surprise and added:

"I can't get him. And even if I could, I wouldn't—for my children's sake."

"Ah," said the Professor from his corner. "Of course you are fond of your children?"

"——love them," whispered Tine. He could scarcely hear the words, but he saw that her eyes were flowing over.

"Then couldn't you stay with Peter?" he said. "For that sin you spoke of, it's——"

"It's not the only one," said Tine.

"Now you had better tell me all," said the Professor.

"Yes, I will," Tine answered, taking out her handkerchief. "I—I—feel a *loathing* for him." The handkerchief went up to her face.

"Is he—unkind to you?" asked the Professor warily.

"He is nothing but kind," said Tine.

"Tell me," said the Professor, coming nearer the table; "this other man—when did you meet him?"

"It was—a long time ago," said Tine.

"How—well did you know him?"

Tine bowed her head and blushed.

"A long time ago, you said. Was it before you were married?"

"Yes."

"But you were married all the same?"

"I was fond of Peter."

"More than of the other?"

"Yes, I think so. More in a—in a real sort of way."

"And you were happy after you were married?"

"Yes. At first."

The Professor sat down at the table opposite her. He remembered the time well, when Peter carried off the girl whom all the young fellows of the parish dreamed of. Of course it had to be the smart young mason with his clean hands and his neat clothes.

He seated himself comfortably in his chair. A familiar feeling of satisfaction came over him. He was in his element, for now he had reached the stage when his sympathy ceased to be human and became artistic. His thoughts worked with Tine and Peter Murer and their fate as a sculptor's hands with the clay.

"I suppose you would prefer to have the children when you're separated from Peter?"

"Well, I'm their mother."

"What is Peter like with the children?"

"He makes much of them—and they of him," she said frankly.

"Then it's rather hard on him," said the Professor, "and not very good for the children either, to have to do without their father."

"Then I shall have to lose them," said Tine.

"It will be still worse for them to do without their mother," he replied.

Tine looked up at him in expectation.

"But you insist on being divorced, whether the children go one way or the other?"

"Yes." It was said gloomily, but with no hesitation.

"Then we must think of the children in the arrangement.—Would you be prepared to live under the same roof with Peter, when once you are separated? Then, you see, the children need know nothing, and they would still be living with both parents."

Tine thought for a moment. This possibility had not occurred to her.

"Yes, I could do that," she said, "when once I was separated."

"Then perhaps it can all be arranged quietly. There's no need for people to hear about it."

Tine looked at him incredulously, but her eyes showed relief. "Can it be done quietly?" she asked. "I thought the authorities——"

"The authorities don't go blabbing about people's private affairs," said the Professor. "It all depends on Peter. I mean, if he will consent—to this way. But you said just now he was good."

"He *is*," said Tine.

"It's a blessing for children," said the Professor, "if their mother thinks their father is good."

Tine's handkerchief went up to her eyes.

"You must see that you go on thinking so," said the Professor. Tine nodded.

"It would be easier if you remembered Peter as he was at the time he was courting you, and always tried to see him like that."

Tine shook her head. "That's all over; even if I wanted to, I couldn't."

"We were talking about the children," said the Professor. "Are they *always* pleased to see their father—or do they vary?"

"They are always pleased to see him."

"Whether it's Sunday or week-day?"

"Of course." Tine began to think rather less of the Professor, if he could ask such questions.

"Well, but, I mean, it must make a difference if he comes and plays with them in his best clothes or all covered with plaster from his work."

"But he's always their father," said Tine.

"Of course," the Professor nodded to himself; "he's always *Peter*."

Tine gave a start.

"Aren't you going to speak to him about the divorce, after all?" she said. Her eyes questioned him sharply.

He looked surprised.

"I told you I would," he answered, and added to clinch the matter: "After what you've told me, you *can't* go on living with him as his wife."

"Thank you," said Tine. "I think the same."

"I'll talk to him to-morrow," the Professor concluded. "It will be best for you to say nothing to him. I don't think he need know anything about—the other. Now finish your coffee."

She did so out of duty. When she left, it was with a feeling of relief, though not of happiness.

The Professor sat down by the window and gazed into space with one eye screwed up and the other opened wide. This was a sign that he was working intensely and seriously, but did not take his task too solemnly.

XXXV. Rustic Idyll

THE afternoon clouds were gathering, the breeze dozed off into a calm.

The Professor lounged in his window, watching the work come to a standstill in one field after another. Horses were taken out, machines left standing in repose. Men and beasts moved gravely over the soil in unconscious communion with it. Their work was done, they were now going home, and as they went they lingered, as it were, in the middle of it all. They had a look of leaning against the air surrounding them. Weariness gave way to a deep sense of well-being, which possessed the whole body. . . .

The gates were shut, all were now indoors, even the roads had nothing left to do. All nature was relaxed in a deep exhalation. As though at a signal, every bird uttered its last chirp and was silent. . . .

Now and then figures appeared at the gates. The sun, now below the horizon, still lingered in their eyes; the contentment of leisure hours was in their faces and in all their limbs.

They gathered in little groups, each with its own interest.

And Ellen Nielsen and Hans Olsen had theirs, as they stood looking over the land which belonged to Niels Jakob's farmhouse. For they had now arrived at the point when they were able to buy it, and so their banns were to be put up.

Yes, next Sunday their names would be pronounced together from the pulpit over there in the church. Their eyes sought the church-tower; and their feet began to move in that direction—as they had done so many times before. They could never be tired of walking past the school and looking in.

“For that's where it was we saw each other for the first time,” said Hans. This remark had the same virginal freshness every time he uttered it.

Before they knew it they were on the playground; their feet agreed so well together. They said but little as they walked; the thoughts of each distilled into the other. When at last they

said something, it was chiefly for the comfort of thinking aloud.

They stopped close to the churchyard wall.

"There's the elder," said Hans Olsen.

This was enough to chain them in deep memories.

Soon after, Ellen went right up to the wall; without a trace of hesitation, she went to a definite spot.

"Just here it was that Holger Enke put you, that day when he picked you up and washed you," she said. "And those curls on your forehead were there then."

They stood awhile at the place where Holger had put him down, and their thoughts travelled far away to the gloomy place where Holger was now. Both freed their minds of it at the same time.

"Shall we go in and look at Hansine's grave?" said Hans.

The grave was well looked after, tidy and smart as a little toy garden. The sight of it gave them a happy satisfaction.

"Yes—both her parents are there now beside her," said Ellen.

"It's the best thing, too," said Hans, "for she was the only one they had. I'm always so glad you look after the grave so that it isn't neglected."

"I couldn't help it," said Ellen. "Isn't it strange that I still think the best thing I've known, almost, was the times I've played with her when we were at school?"

"Let's walk on a bit," said Hans.

On leaving the churchyard, he sat down in the place where Holger Enke had deposited him on that sorrowful day.

"I was thinking about Holger," he said, "and I didn't like to talk about it in there by Hansine's grave—they say he's behaved himself so well where he is that they think of letting him out. Supposing he comes home again some day?"

"He can never show himself here any more," said Ellen.

"No, I shouldn't think so," said Hans; "not up there in the churchyard anyhow. Where can that Vissingrød miller's man be now?"

"He's in America, surely," Ellen thought.

Hans got up; the ground was getting cold.

"It's beginning to get late," said Ellen.

The moon was up when they passed the school.

"Everything looks different by moonlight," said Ellen; "it's not a bit like our old school."

"Ah, it's being grown up and older makes it look different, too," said Hans, falling into reflection.

"But when we think about Hansine, running about and playing in there—then it's all just the same as it used to be. There's something in the world, after all, which keeps on being the same."

They both became silent. Hans Olsen had shown the way to deep places in the soul, which they could not plumb with thought or word. Their feelings had to trickle vaguely from one to the other.

But the deeper the silence in which they walked, the more intimate became their tacit communing.

XXXVI. Separation

NEXT day Peter Murer arrived punctually at the Professor's hen-house.
"You must excuse me for not coming yesterday," he said.

"You're all right, Peter," said the Professor, "when you've got such a pretty apology as your wife to send."

Peter smiled, but the smile quickly changed to a look of trouble.

Martine passed along the road and said good morning. The Professor followed her with his eyes.

"It's strange how quickly young wives get old and ugly," he said.

"It must be childbearing and hard work," said Peter.

"But Tine has had children too," said the Professor.

Peter looked before him like a man afraid to rejoice over what is his only joy.

"Tine has grown melancholy," he said.

"What from?" asked the Professor.

Peter stood aimlessly chipping a brick with his trowel.

"We can't find out, neither the doctor nor I. But"—he brought down the trowel more viciously—"I'm afraid the doctor thinks there's a danger of downright insanity. I don't know whether it would be a good thing to take her over to Copenhagen and try a nerve specialist—a professor."

The Professor shrugged his shoulders.

"They're expensive," he said, "and they're mighty little use anyhow."

"But they *must* know a bit more than most people," Peter hoped. His tone was full of supplication, he wanted so badly to hear an admission.

"I happen to know of a case over in Copenhagen," said the Professor, "where a lot of money was thrown away on specialists—and I'm hanged if it didn't end in suicide after all."

Peter dropped his trowel. "What do you say!"

"Yes, she took her own life in the end."

"Was—was that one a wo—a lady too?"

"It's generally women who are taken that way," said the Professor, "and, oddly enough, the best of them."

He went into the house, lit his indispensable cigar, and strolled about the garden. Peter went on building the hen-house. But his thoughts were not on his work. At last he put down his trowel and went up to the Professor.

"That—er—lady you were talking about, who died—how was it——?"

The Professor sent out a puff of smoke. "She took poison."

"Poison!"

"Yes," said the other, professionally; "the means are various, but the result is the same. Some use poison, others the bread-knife."

"It's terrible," said Peter. "What can that kind of thing come from?"

"Sometimes one thing, sometimes another," said the Professor. "In the case I was talking about, it came from her marriage."

"Was—was she unhappily married?" asked Peter.

"No, she got the very man she wanted."

They walked towards the hen-house. Peter sat down on a pile of bricks. "Did it come on her suddenly—or——?"

"Nobody knew how it came," the Professor began. "Her father was a rich business man; she was his only child, and she went and fell in love with the chauffeur. A very decent fellow, for that matter. The father didn't like it, but, as I say, the chauffeur was a very decent fellow, and the end of it was that they were married. All the smart young men in town raved about her, but there it was, she took the chauffeur. As you can imagine, he couldn't do enough for her. For he could see that she was a much finer nature than he."

Peter nodded vigorously.

"And so he accepted her as a gift he could never deserve."

"Of course," said Peter; "but did she come to repent it?"

"No. But—well, we can all be wise after the event. Now that she's dead, we can explain the whole thing.—That's what the specialist said when he told me the story."

"Yes, but what was the matter with her?" Peter rose to his feet. The Professor noticed that his hands were shaking with excitement.

"Well, you see—so long as the chauffeur's happy surprise at her choosing him lasted, all went well. But—you know—you gradually get accustomed to the idea that the person you're married to is your wife."

"It can't be avoided," thought Peter.

"No, but that's just what upset her."

Peter looked at the Professor in surprise.

"It's beyond me."

"Perhaps. But, at any rate, she began to get melancholy."

Peter pondered in uncertainty.

"Well, but it can't be that——"

"Now listen what it led to. She came to have a *loathing* for her husband."

Peter breathed heavily and could find nowhere to rest his eyes.

"But the man had no idea of it," the Professor continued; "he paid no attention to this kind of whim, and one fine day insanity broke out. Do you know what she fancied? She thought she was a prostitute—you know——"

"A who——"

"Just so. At last she insisted that her husband should pay for her favours, as is the custom with ladies of that class."

"Oh, but that's horrible," said Peter. "Poor thing!"

"Do you mean her or him?"

"To be sure, I mean—both of them."

"Yes, but the strange thing is that, the more loathing she had for her husband, the stronger grew his desire for her.—I suppose you can't understand that?"

Peter bent his head and examined the point of his wooden shoe.

"Oh—yes," he said, in a low voice.

"Well, so it was anyhow, and he agreed to pay her."

Peter shook his head, scandalized. "Why, how could he treat his own wife like that!"

"We—ell," said the Professor, "you see, she made out that that was how he had been treating her a long time."

"Yes—of course, she was mad," Peter admitted.

"She must have been," said the Professor, "because she declared he was just the same with her as he used to be before with the women in the back streets."

Peter glared at the Professor's eyes; his face did not move a muscle, but it turned grey. For a moment both stood motionless. Then Peter Murer's hand clenched, his arm bent, and he

struck his fist against a post so that the blood spurted from the knuckles, and his voice came with the blow:

"She was damned well *right!*"

"Why, do you know him?" asked the Professor.

"No," said Peter quietly. "But I'm afraid most of us are chauffeurs with our wives."

"Oh, well, the wives stand it all right," said the Professor reassuringly.

"Not all of them," said Peter.

"This one didn't, at any rate," said the Professor. "She left a letter asking her husband's forgiveness for having carried on this shameful trade. She herself couldn't stand it any longer and was therefore going to take her life. She died of veronal. First she tried the bread-knife, but they took it from her."

"The bread-knife!" Peter wiped the sweat from his face and looked at his watch. It was close on the time when Tine would be cutting bread for the little ones.

"Couldn't I run home for a minute?" he asked. "Tine's so lonely."

"Yes," said the Professor, "you can go if you like, but first I have something to say to you which I promised Tine yesterday."

"You're very near losing her."

Peter collapsed entirely.

"Losing her!" he whispered. "Is she thinking of the same——?"

"No. Tine's a sensible woman. But she wants to be divorced from you."

Peter sank down on to the bricks and held his hands before his face.

"My God!" he groaned. "My God!—And the children, the poor children!"

"Well, of course they will stay with her," said the Professor.

"Of course, of course.—But what shall I have left——? Do you know what, sir? I believe the bread-knife's the handiest thing for me."

"She is quite willing to let you keep the children," said the Professor.

But Peter shook his head. "I would never take *them* from her—too."

"She is also quite willing to go on living with you, when once you are separated."

Peter looked up. His face cleared a little, but immediately grew dark again.

"It isn't allowed, when you're separated," he said.

"Oh, yes," asserted the Professor; "you can get a dispensation—in consideration of the wife's state of mind," he added with a learned air.

"My God!" said Peter. "Then she really wants to be divorced from me."

"There's this about a separation," said the Professor, "that if it is broken at the desire of *both* parties, then the marriage holds good exactly as before."

"Then do you think——?"

"I think you have to win and deserve Tine over again, my good Peter."

Peter looked hopeless.

"She has seen me as I *am*," he said.

"Was that when you were courting her—or now?" asked the Professor, and, as Peter made no answer, he added:

"We must treat our nice feelings as carefully as we do our nice clothes, Peter."

"Yes—and we must have our nice clothes on when we're in nice company," Peter nodded.

"So you've been talking to her," he went on after a short pause. "Do you think she would some day——"

"Nobody can tell that," the Professor interrupted. "You must be legally separated, and she must have the right to a complete divorce when the term of separation is over—unless you want to leave things as they are and risk——"

"No, no!" said Peter. "But can't I have a little crumb of hope?—I *know* she's done with me for the present. I ought to have seen it long ago. You mustn't think I'm just a thoughtless booby, sir—but you get into a groove—and then there's nobody to open your eyes like—— You were talking about Martine—yes, now I can see it all.

"Well, then, I'll go home now and talk to her."

"I suppose I had better get the separation document drawn up," said the Professor.

"Ye—es—if she must have it," sighed Peter.

"Well, well," said the Professor, "remember that the children won't know anything about it, nor anyone else except myself."

"The lawyer and the parson," said Peter.

"We can leave out the parson," said Peter.

"No, we can't. He'll have to try and reconcile us."

"Oh, yes, but Pastor Barnes will keep his mouth shut. And the lawyer too."

In the course of the afternoon he went over to the parsonage. A few days later Pastor Barnes made a perfunctory attempt at mediation. Afterwards he went to see the Professor.

"I trust I have not acted wrongly," he said. "I have an old-fashioned aversion to divorce, and when the term of separation has run its course, there is the risk that they may actually be divorced."

"Not immediately," said the Professor.

"You think not?"

The Professor handed him the fair copy of the separation document.

Pastor Barnes began to read it. He had not gone very far when he looked up at the Professor and took out his handkerchief with a certain amount of haste. He made diligent use of it as he read on.

Suddenly he gave a start and stared at the Professor in dismay.

"But, merciful Heaven!" he exclaimed; "suppose some day they put an end to the separation 'in accordance with what may legally be deemed the deliberate and duly considered desire of both contracting parties,' and go and get a child—what *am* I to do then?"

"I guess you'll have to christen it," said the Professor.

"I *can't* do that," cried Pastor Barnes in despair. "I should have this terrible document before my eyes the whole time, and I should burst out laughing in the middle of the ceremony." . . .

Neither Tine nor Peter was disposed to laugh when the Professor solemnly read out the document to them, and all they succeeded in gathering from its threatening and involved phrases was that if they signed it they were legally separated.

So they traced their names in careful copy-book style, and the Professor added his as witness and received the fee.

The document ought to be deposited at the lawyer's, he said.

Probably he didn't want to risk their sitting down to study it in a critical spirit one fine day.

XXXVII. The Black One

DAHL was convinced that the ecstatic expansion of the soul was a perfectly natural psychic process which followed laws like the rest of man's mental life, and that the exercises which had once produced it must be capable of doing so again.

But although he followed the *cappellano's* precepts with greater zeal than before, no ecstasy came. His desire of comprehension was still under the spell of the insight ecstasy gave him into the mysteries of existence, and his heart thirsted for a renewal of the blessed experience. At times he felt it near him, but at the last moment his mind closed, and he was plunged into vacancy and aridity. He did not know that the light he now and then thought he glimpsed, was a will-o'-the-wisp. It was the idea of the rapture once experienced that gleamed in his imagination and brought him a brief intoxication. This very idea, without his guessing it, became a wall between himself and the experience.

On the other hand, his spiritual exercises developed a nervous sensibility in his bodily senses. He began to see flashes of light and to hear sounds, the physical origin of which he could not discover. Invisible silver bells would suddenly begin ringing in the air. Voices spoke, as though he were overhearing a telephonic conversation. He felt himself surrounded by beings he could not see.

In particular, he was tormented by an idea that a being sat at home in his room waiting for him. And this being was an enemy.

At times this idea became so strong that he turned back from his own door and went up to Sophus Petersen.

He had made friends with this excellent theosophical breeches-maker, who was trustfully "developing" himself according to the precepts of the mahatmas.

There was no wavering about Sophus Petersen, and no nervous sensibility, but his handsome face, with its dark beard, was

obviously becoming ennobled and a spiritual light had been kindled in the naïve brown eyes. Dahl's excited nerves came to rest when he sat on the chastity sofa in Petersen's tidy little room.

This sofa was the dark spot in Petersen's life. He had been told that without absolute chastity nobody could become an occultist, but he saw very well that the sacrifice, which his "development" made fairly easy for him, was a hard one for his young wife, who considered herself discarded as a woman. This worried Petersen, but he had, "however," no choice.

Petersen's friends, Kjellström and "the seraph," watched this domestic tragedy with brotherly sympathy; they understood both sides and shared their tacit suffering.

Kjellström was the more concerned, for he was married and knew what women were like.

"If only they had had children," he said one day when he was coming away from Petersen's with Dahl and "the seraph," "if only they had had children it would be all right. Now we shall see, it'll end in disaster and divorce.

"Would you like to look at my machine?"

It had long ago outgrown the cigar-box, and stood in the middle of his room, made of new and substantial materials.

"It'll soon go," he said; "there's only a wheel wanting."

He had said that before, and the machine had grown till there was hardly a place for himself in the little room. There was always one wheel wanting.

"I'm troubled about Petersen's home," said "the seraph" to Dahl after they had left; "but I'm still more troubled about friend Kjellström himself. That machine is eating him up. It is a perpetual machine, because there will perpetually be one more wheel to go on to it. And when friend Kjellström discovers this some day, his own machinery will go to pieces.

"No," he went on, after a pause, "the inmost nature of existence cannot be transferred to a soulless machine.—If it can be expressed at all, it must be in a tone.

"In the beginning was the Word, we are told. I believe that the Word was a tone. Tone has creative power. You know that with tones you can form geometrical figures—in fine sand, for instance—and the Hindus maintain that their mantras, sung in the right tone, have creative force. If a man found his own tone and could tune it in unison with the universe, he would perhaps be able to sing himself into Nirvana."

He stood still, as though listening to something in himself, and Dahl thought:

"Barnes is right; we are all the same, we are seeking the impossible, the philosopher's stone: Kjellström, trying to fathom the mechanics of existence; 'the seraph,' listening for the Word which was in the beginning; Sophus Petersen, seeking to become one of the pure in heart who shall see God—and myself, trying to find the way back to the unblemished innocence of Paradise. Each of us is ready to think the others will end in madness. God knows what will happen to us; for we are all hopelessly in the power of our innermost impulses. Truly there is need of a religion for the modern religiously-minded. A man who found the natural way to the illumination of ecstasy must be able to create, or at least prepare, the way for the religion without dogma." . . .

The worst of it was that Dahl could no longer sleep. He saw flashes of light and heard voices whenever he was just going off. It was not much better if he left the lamp burning. True, he could then drop off to sleep for a moment, but, immediately after, he started up in terror with the idea that somebody was bending over him to strangle him.

This somebody was always the one who sat waiting for him when he was out.

When he was awake he could keep him off by setting his will against him, so that in the day-time it was not so bad. But blasphemous ideas began to force their way into his devotional exercises. For he did not believe in the *cappellano's* Holy Trinity; he had taken it as a symbolical expression for the nature of goodness, but now the symbol suddenly suggested grotesque ideas which destroyed his feeling of devotion.

He was at his best when out and about. But even then he was often a prey to ideas which he would not acknowledge as his own. Among them was a violent desire for Mrs. Emilie Petersen. He couldn't understand it; for when he visited his friend the theosophist and had his eyes on his young wife, she aroused no sort of feeling but pity. But the temptation came again and again, especially in his hours of devotion, and one day he saw with consternation that it did not consist in a natural desire for the pretty woman, but in a devilish craving to see her sorrow find vent in a *sin*.

It was, of course, the everlasting sleepless nights that were wearing out his nerves. If only he could get a deep, sound sleep! . . .

He undressed and went to bed. He would think about the hazel hedge at home by the school. Now he could clearly see the playground and the church and the elder——

He heard a quiet laugh right in his ear. He turned and stared round the room. A cold shiver shook his frame; for now he saw the one who had been waiting for him.

Saw him and knew him. It was the black figure that "Crooked Susanna" had seen in her hysterical clairvoyance. The same paralysing, poisonous atmosphere proceeded from him as before.

He saw him plainly, for the room was light, not with daylight, nor with lamplight, but another kind of light, which seemed perfectly natural, though it did not light up the room itself, but only the air in it.

The figure was black, surrounded by a poisonous substance resembling coal-fumes, which fitted the figure as closely as the skin fits a black cat. The face expressed strength of will, mocking malignity and craftiness; the features themselves were almost handsome, "ennobled," if one can say so, by intelligent cruelty.

The figure seemed to read his thoughts; it answered them as soon as they appeared.

"Yes, it is I," it said. The voice seemed not to be using the air as a medium; it sounded clearly, but without noise—without sound, so to speak—within Dahl's ear.

"It is I, sure enough. Last time I kept a little in the background. You were then pretty close to an experience which had given you no mean strength.

"You fooled us that time. She died, in fact, as 'herself.' Well, it wasn't much of a prize the 'higher powers,' as you call them, got in her. We had plucked her pretty well beforehand.

"Don't I too acknowledge these powers as 'higher'? I can't very well do that, seeing that we are opposing them with a fair amount of success.

"Now, you see, you're trying a regular modern trick: such beings as myself don't exist at all! I could reply, of course, that you can both see and hear me, but sure enough you'll shelter yourself behind the postulate that I'm a hallucination. However, I think I shall soon succeed in convincing you that we really

do exist. Now, you believe—in a sort of way, at any rate—in the existence of the ‘higher powers.’ I cannot acknowledge their ‘highness,’ but for the sake of convenience I will use the designation current among men. Many of you believe in guardian angels. I shall not undertake to confirm this belief; on the other hand, I can assure you that you have what you would call ‘guardian devils,’ who prompt you with many good suggestions.

“Am *I yours?* No, I haven’t that honour. I rank somewhat higher, but am temporarily attached to you on account of a certain experience which has called our attention to you. I must tell you straight out: we can’t have the so-called ‘divine love’ manifesting itself among men.

“Do I, then, acknowledge its existence? By all means—unfortunately. Only I don’t consider it ‘divine.’ The very opposite, in fact.—Why?—Well, you see, if it were divine it would naturally be victorious, but it is not.

“I must tell you—no, don’t strain yourself any more; you can’t force me away. I have helpers behind me. There’s a whole host transmitting power to me—in case the enemy should try to come to your aid, as happened the other day, when you drove ‘the other one’ out of ‘Crooked Susanna.’ You remember the strength that was put into you just when you wanted it most? Stop it now. It will end as it always does: *we* are the ones who win.

“Look about you in the world. Don’t you find all men ‘fighting the good fight’? (I use your own terminology, though I object to it.) Then who sees to it that the results are ‘evil’?

“*We do!* In small things as well as great. Take the case of two friends who would do anything for each other. One day one of them happens to say some little thing which hits the other just on a sore spot. It might be put right in a second and their friendship would go on for ever. But as it is, the injured party, ‘against his will,’ answers in the same tone, and so it goes on. Both of them feel that they don’t really mean a word of what they’re saying, but an irresistible impulse forces the injurious words from their lips, although in their hearts they suffer for it. Finally they part as enemies. Where does the irresistible impulse come from? It comes from *us*.

“Or a husband and wife who were born for each other. Is the fire to be lighted or not? It takes no more than that. And little causes are the best, I may tell you. They produce that slight irritation which is required for insulting outbursts. Is the dog’s

tail to be docked or not? A trifling start like that leads to many a good enmity, many a nice divorce. Who inspires the poisonous words? *We* do.

"Whence come all the little touchy snarls, all the petty hints of discontent which make everyday life a burden? They come from us. Little things, but effective. Who do you think is smart enough to work the switch that turns *love* of country into national *hatred*, class-consciousness into class-hatred? These feelings begin so nicely with love, but if they end in hatred you may be sure it is we who have won.

"We have always done so and we shall go on doing so to the end, till the kingdom is ours. Then man's real happiness will begin. Until then we shall do as we have done hitherto: destroy every culture you raise upon other principles than ours. We destroy it from within, as the worm devours the wood.

"Look at Christianity. Has it never struck you that the best of its priests are ours? I don't say *all*, but the *best*.

"You don't believe me? Nor do the priests; but what does that matter, if they serve us? Let us take an example, an anonymous one—*nomina sunt odiosa*—we'll take a *type*: the eloquent priest with his eyes turned to heaven, his fine, expressive gestures, the man who makes it all so easy, for God is a loving father who does not ask more of us than we are able to accomplish, and the little that is asked is affectionately smoothed out by the velvet voice till there is hardly anything left. If he mentions God once in his sermon, he mentions himself nine times, and might just as well give himself the tenth too; for God is singularly like himself in the pulpit. He is pleased with his congregation, and his congregation is pleased with him; and this feeling easily leads to his being pleased with himself. As this takes place in church, it is regarded as devotion.

"But you have yourself found out that self-satisfaction *excludes the possibility* of real devotion.

"When our priest leaves his dear congregation for a richer living, they show their gratitude by making a collection for him, understanding perfectly well that his master (that is, *we*) desires him a better living and that he accepts it. They would do the same themselves and are glad of the good example. This priest is one of our best. He is quietly and calmly killing Christ with veronal.

"There is another type that serves us in a more direct fashion.

They positively preach us. You may know them by their mentioning the devil nine times for every time they mention God. They might just as well mention him the tenth time too; for when they say 'God' you can tell by their spiteful voice that they are talking about a malignant devil. They deliver Christ alive into our hands, since they give us 'these my little ones,' in whose hearts they put fear. It is written, 'perfect love casteth out fear.' But where fear is, love has lost and the devil has won the game.

"You're surprised at my quoting the Scriptures? The Bible is an excellent book. True, many of us are against it and try to inspire the 'enlightened' among men with the idea of making a new bible of human origin. It's not a bad idea, but they overlook the fact that a bible of that sort would never inspire devotion and therefore still less a fear of the supernatural.

"Personally, I stick to the Bible. It is a *true* book. Only it has to be read with intelligence. It describes the conflict between the powers. Describes it veraciously and in our favour. For we have been winning ever since the Fall of Man. When the power that you call 'God' sent his 'Son' Christ to earth to 'save' men, we killed him, and men were *not* 'saved.' The powers of 'Light' themselves admit that it was only a little flock that was saved. But that event, the murder of Christ, is a sacrament repeated daily. I spoke about the priests who gently do him to death with veronal, and those who deliver him alive into our hands. But now look all over the world at the treatment accorded to 'these his little ones'—and whatsoever you do to them, you do also to him. That was truly spoken. Can you doubt that Christ is put to death daily? Can you doubt that it is we who have the power, we who *in reality* are the 'good'?

"How does Christ reward his servants? With suffering and death. How do we reward ours? With honour and advancement. With unbounded self-satisfaction. And there is no pettiness about us. Look at our priests. They are quite unconscious of being in our service, but, bless you, they get their reward all the same. Is not self-preservation stronger than self-sacrifice? And more sensible; the other is only foolishness. Is the 'good' man to sacrifice himself for the less good? It *must* be so, since the less good is not going to sacrifice himself for the more good. For if he did, he would himself *be* the more good, that is, the more foolish. That's logic, isn't it? 'Hate' is a stronger desire than love. Love can wait, hate thirsts for action.

"Tell me now whether you will join the winning or the losing side; that is what I have come for. I am speaking to you frankly. I daren't do that to our priests; they have to fool themselves before they can fool their congregations.

"We think highly of you. You have been able to open yourself to the 'divine love.' So you can also attain to *ours*. Choose us and work with your eyes open, but in secret, for our plans. I promise you all you can desire of bodily and mental delight. Whatever calling you select, you shall arrive at its highest dignities.—Remain in the church and become our bishop. Your joy shall be unbounded. You know the nature of it, for you have already felt the mathematical pleasure in turning a 'good' equation into a 'bad' one—precisely; I was thinking of your friend the ascetic and his wife. See how easily they might have lived together affectionately and well. See how easily the best feelings of both may be applied to evil. Begin with them. And, believe me, you will feel that the delights of 'sin' are greater than those of 'innocence.' "

He approached noiselessly. Dahl felt the poisonous atmosphere drawing near to his bed, mixing with his breath, penetrating his body, paralysing his will, benumbing his consciousness as with a narcotic; the will to resist was awake but not active. In a moment his consciousness would lose its hold, his resistance would cease, and then the direction of his will would have changed for ever, he would have become another and an evil one. With an effort which seemed stronger than himself—like that which may give a sinking man a little extra breath under water by renewing in an inexplicable way the air in his lungs—he tore himself free of the paralysing, poisoning influence and cried out from the depths of his inmost being:

"*No! Never* will I belong to you, but will resist you even to destruction, if need be!"

"Destruction it will be," replied the evil one. "You have made your choice—for ever. I did not expect you would be able; I thought terror would effect what reason could not accomplish. But your vaunted 'free will' has actually this much about it, that we cannot force you *consciously* to will 'evil.' Otherwise—as you will find out—your 'free will' is not of much account.

"Now you have had your chance—and thrown it away. The consequences will not be lacking. What is hell, to him who finds his delight in it, but a paradise? Only to him whose inmost de-

light is elsewhere, is it a 'hell.' Your place is sure enough. For you needn't think we stop half-way.

"Through all the spheres a conflict is going on between two principles—the conflict you know of is only a summer-lightning reflection from the flashes of the spheres. There is no giving or asking of quarter in this conflict. Principle is opposed to principle. Intelligent self-gratification against the folly of self-sacrifice. Can't you see that it is a conflict between health and sickness, between life and death? What is the Christ-idea but a sickness of the mind? What a perverted desire to choose suffering and death instead of life and happiness! Can you imagine that such things will vanquish life's healthiness?—Look about you. Even now fathers rejoice to see the brutal instincts of their babies. 'This little devil will get on in life'—and so he will. No, the fathers don't believe in us, but what does that matter if they live according to our laws? We are not like the others, who insist on your acknowledging their *name*."

He bent over the bed and whispered:

"Then serve us *unconsciously*, like these fathers and our priests, for verily I say unto you that ours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Look."

He threw the light that surrounded him over the life of men. Dahl saw it penetrate like an electric search-light through the minds of men, disclosing the little perversions, the thousand aberrations of thought which cause men in good faith to act in the service of evil. An infinite hopelessness came over him, for the confusion was so great, and all were acting in such good faith, that there seemed no possibility of their being saved from mutual destruction.

An impulse to pray was born in his heart, to pray all his life long: "Deliver us from evil."

He began the old prayer: "Our Father, which art——"

Horror-stricken, he clenched his teeth to check the terrible blasphemy which, against his will, his tongue was beginning to utter.

The evil one laughed:

"That comes of being a freethinker and religious at the same time, so that you use Catholic books for your spiritual exercises. The family life of the Trinity suggests many droll fancies."

Dahl's head hurt him badly; he had a feeling that it was going

to burst. He pressed his hands against his forehead and felt that they were wet with sweat.

It reassured him a little to feel this cold sweat.

"I am ill," he thought. "To-morrow I'll go to a doctor and tell him I've long been suffering from sleeplessness and have now begun to have hallucinations. A *doctor*—a *doctor*——"

He went on repeating the word, as though trying to acquire a doctor's sober view of the night's experience. But he still saw the black figure.

"Now you're beginning to be normal," it said, smiling. "You're quite right; it is all your prayers and invocations that have excited your nerves. For prayer is magic, let me tell you. When you invoke, *someone* always comes—occasionally an 'angel,' sometimes a devil. You have prayed much, and I have come. I will be frank and tell you that, if you stop praying, I shall disappear *eo ipso*. You believe I'm lying because I'm a devil. You can try. Light the lamp; you have matches on the chair there. When the lamp is alight I shall be gone. *I can't bear any light but my own*. Just like the men whose spirit is the same as ours.

"But if you pray, I shall come again. It is written, 'Ask and ye shall receive.' But it doesn't say *what* you will get.

"Let your thoughts ramble, my dear fellow; then they'll be dulled and you'll fall asleep. Take the paper and read a little. Try the fiction page; there'll hardly be so many lies in it as in the other columns. It's worth trying."

The lamp! Ah, if he lighted it, perhaps he would escape seeing.

He reached out his hand for the matches, struck one, his eyes were dazzled by the flash, but he felt his way to the lamp and got it alight.

He looked around. There was no one in the room. Naturally.

To-morrow he would ask a doctor for a sleeping-draught. Now there was the rest of the night to be got rid of. There lay the paper, but then he'd read it. There was nothing left but the serial. It was nice and long—two whole pages.

He jumped right into the story without an idea of who was who. It was splendidly nonsensical. Just at an exciting place it broke off, naturally. But he could amuse himself by guessing what would happen. No doubt the key to it was in what the detective said to the girl. Where was it now?

He began at the top. No, it was farther on. Here it was: "I have noticed, said the detective——"

The paper slipped out of Dahl's hand; the detective said some meaningless drivel, which drew Dahl into the illogical world of sleep. . . .

When he awoke he had a bad headache and a feeling that his whole body was penetrated by poisonous fumes.

And his hands were black—his shirt too—a thick woolly coating surrounded him like the fur on a black cat.

He looked about the room in alarm. It was daylight; but the lamp was still burning. He had fallen asleep without extinguishing it. Thick smoke was pouring out of the chimney. All this black stuff was lamp-smoke. He got up and put it out.

The paper lay on the table, covered with soot. But how did it come to be on the table? He had been reading it in bed until he fell asleep.

He shook the soot off it. What was that? Just above the serial was an advertisement which consisted of an empty square with a note of interrogation in the middle. In the empty space something had been written in ink; some of it was crossed out again.

"Watch and pray" were the words, in his own childish hand from the time he went to the village-school. Yes, exactly as if it came out of his copy-book. But a line had been drawn through it, and underneath, in a bold hand he had never seen before, was:

"Don't pray, but sleep."

And, below that, some figures:

13—23—9.

Who had written that? And how had the paper come on to the table? Had he been walking in his sleep? He knew his own childish writing in "Watch and pray"; but the other was not his hand. "Don't pray, but sleep"! That was what he was thinking when he believed he saw the evil one.

But the numbers! 13—23—9.

9—he was living at No. 9.

He felt the paralysing poison which surrounded the evil one. Of course it was the smoke of the lamp. But when he first felt it during the night, the lamp had not been lighted!

He made a dash for the window and got it open. The fresh

air poured in. The healthiness of life itself. He stood at the window drinking it in. The cold did him good.

People came and went in the street below, to the grocer's at one corner, to the baker's at the other. Two paviours stood discussing whether the frost was gone for good. A man was chatting with the policeman.

He went to the wash-stand and hurried over his washing and dressing. He longed to be among those people again.

The man was still talking to the policeman, but getting ready to say good-bye. The paviours were walking off, having settled that there would be no more frost this year, the sun was too strong.

He went out. He had a craving to get really close to all these people. He would have liked to speak to the policeman, but couldn't think of anything to ask him. Where could those two paviours have gone?

Sure enough, there was one of them at the end of the little street. He hurried after him and followed him with his eyes on his broad, strong back. The paviour crossed Raadhusplads; Dahl followed: it didn't matter where he went, and there was a nice rustic air about this big, strong fellow.

Going along Gamle Kongevej, the man turned off to the right, and then Dahl thought he had gone far enough. But just there, at No. 23, lived Mrs. Sonne. He had to talk to somebody and went in.

Katharina was alone at home. She had not seen him for several months and was quite shocked at his appearance. He looked many years older. And so tired, as he sat down in the arm-chair.

She stood looking at him and could find nothing to say. She pressed one hand against her breast; something was working so violently within it. It swelled, it fought its way out, and with a wonderful exaltation she felt that a life, stronger than her own, took entire possession of her. In a triumph almost fierce, she knew that she loved him, and that he needed her. She felt herself growing big and strong, as if she were the mother of all the world, and she knew instinctively what it was she had to pluck him from and help him to attain.

She was filled with a contradictory happiness. She was sincerely sorry that he was ill, but this very illness was what

placed her on an equal footing with him and called for her intervention. That he had been brooding more than was good for him she knew from Barnes, and that he *must* be snatched out of all his morbid fancies and brought into the fresh light of day she knew from her own inmost, insuperable nature.

She began talking to him about all sorts of things, any trifle that came into her head, and he listened to her lively, cheerful voice with a pleasure like that of the convalescent the first time he goes out into the sunshine.

She told him about a new horse that Mr. Nedergaard had bought and that she had been trying in the riding-school. It carried its head rather high, but had a wonderfully easy action in galloping. She was looking forward tremendously to taking it out as soon as the weather got a little milder.

"That won't be long," said Dahl; "the sun already is very strong. The frost will soon be gone for this year."

He looked at her in admiration.

"Do you know what? You positively look like a paviour!"

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, as soon as he could get a word in after the fit of laughter that succeeded her air of amazement. "It was honestly meant for a compliment, for this very morning, standing at my window, I fell deeply in love with two paviours and a policeman—but *most* with the paviours."

"Here comes Mother," said Katharina, turning to the door and just managing to quell a sudden blush before it opened.

"I promised Mother coffee when she came home," she said. "It'll be ready in a minute, and you shall have a cup too—as a reward for the paviour."

Mrs. Sonne looked with concern at Dahl's thin, pale face.

"You're not ill?" she asked.

"No," he said, "not ill, but——" He felt a sudden impulse to confide in her—partly, at any rate. He told her that he had resumed the exercises, hoping for a repetition of the ecstasy, but that this time they had had quite the opposite effect; he had grown nervous, his devotions had been disturbed—at times by positive *temptations*——

As he said this and encountered her questioning eyes, a shy and dispirited look came into his own, as though he was suddenly afraid of saying more.

Something within her made her bend forward and search his

face. She abandoned all discretion, almost forgot the man himself, in her eagerness to seize and understand an expression in his face, and her very scrutiny evoked it more clearly.

He shrank a little, as though afraid both of himself and of her proximity, and then she released his eyes and he no longer existed for her.

She pressed her hand against her breast in exactly the same way as Katharina had done, gave a sigh of profound relief, and turned to the window. A bright and happy smile came over her face as she closed her eyes tightly. Without a thought of Dahl, who was staring at her in surprise, she passed through a moment which reconciled her with life and destiny.

A dark hour in her existence had been transformed to radiant light, a light from the sun of Italy.

That expression in the *cappellano's* face had always been with her, like a punishment. That look was the last he had given her. But it brought to an end the blissful time in the South. It was not her fault that she loved him; she loved him as she loved God, and God as she loved him; she had made no appreciable difference between them. But that day she knew that he saw it in her face, and she read her doom in his and wished herself dead. A dark and pitiless severity came over his face as he was speaking to her; he *shrank* from her. And he never came again. Then it was that she had asked to be allowed to enter a convent in order to become worthy of him, to lead a life like his.

Though she had afterwards made a happy marriage and settled down into a life like other people's, she had never got over that moment, when he rejected her as his confidential friend.

Until now, when in a rapture of joy she saw her own foolishness. It was not her but himself he had condemned. He renounced her friendship, since otherwise he would have had to make her his mistress. He left her, because she was a *temptation*. The dark spot was in fact the very sun of her life, only she had been blind and had not seen it.

Katharina came in with the coffee. Dahl was in a reverie and looked as if he wanted sleep. Really, Mother would never be properly grown up!

There she sat with half-closed eyes, happy and cheerful, not taking the slightest notice of her visitor—just like a young girl

who dreams away and forgets that there are other people in the room.

"Here's the coffee!" she cried. "Aren't you going to wake up?"

"And now I have something to propose to you"—she turned to Dahl. "I made it up at the same time as the coffee. You must learn to ride! Nedergaard has three horses now. You will please go and take lessons; I'll speak to the riding-master about it to-morrow, and in a month's time we shall all three be riding out together. I'll get Nedergaard to let you ride my old mare instead of selling her."

"But, Katharina!" said Mrs. Sonne.

"This is out of your line," said Katharina. "Mr. Dahl is to learn to ride; it will do him good. Is it a bargain?"

"Well, it might be a good thing—I'll think it over," laughed Dahl.

"Think! you'll do nothing of the sort—you've had far too much of that. You'll go to the bootmaker's and get your boots. To-morrow I'll talk to the riding-master."

"I'm afraid you'll force me into it," said Dahl. "But I wish you would."

"You bet I will," she said. . . .

She was so full of will-power that for the next few days she entirely took over the management of the house. "Mother does nothing but dream," she said.

"You are really grown up now," said Mrs. Sonne. "Sometimes you order me about in a way that almost makes me think you're my mother."

"Well, *I'm* perfectly convinced that I've got a daughter," answered Katharina. "Some fine day I suppose I'll have to see that you don't go and fall in love with a smart young man.

"I was thinking we'd have ox-tail soup for dinner to-day."

"Yes," said Mrs. Sonne; "I'll go and see about——"

"You can leave that to me," said Katharina.

"Are you sure you can manage it?"

"I can manage anything in the world!"

Gay as a lark, she flew out into the kitchen.

XXXVIII. The Numbers

“**I** SHOULD think you *could* sleep, Mr. Daahl, when you once get started,” said his old landlady. “This is the third time I’ve been in with your coffee. And yesterday I could hardly get you to answer when I brought in your dinner. So you can see how badly you wanted it.”

Yes, he had wanted sleep badly. But now he had spent two days and two nights in nothing but eating and sleeping. A healthy feeling weighed upon all his limbs and demanded exercise.

He went out. The weather was clear and not cold. Those paviours were right, the sun was stronger and stronger.

Crossing Kongens Nytorv, he met Sophus Petersen, on his way to a meeting of the Theosophical Lodge. As usual, he felt a warm delight as he looked into Petersen’s clear eyes. Their goodness was infectious, and their ingenuousness seemed to have a message for the simple innocence which he still thought was his own inmost nature.

He would have liked to do Sophus Petersen a kindness. Why couldn’t he have a confidential talk with Mrs. Emilie and gently explain to her what her husband’s awkward tongue had never ventured to touch upon? If she could be brought to understand her husband’s motives, she would see that his feelings for her had suffered no depreciation.

It was a delicate subject, and he pondered for a long time over how he could introduce it. The more he pondered, the more absorbed he became. He walked far beyond the door.

As he turned back he decided to leave the introduction to the inspiration of the moment. If he began to talk about Sophus and the lodge meeting, she would be sure to say something which might be used as an opening.—Where was the door? Oh, here was No. 9—11 and then 13; yes, there it was.

13, where was it he had last seen that number?

Why, it was—it was the first of the numbers written on the

newspaper underneath the words, "Don't pray, but sleep"! Well, he'd slept anyhow!

Just as he raised his foot to go up the steps, still with his eyes on the house-number, it seemed to him that this number became a living being: it had a face! In an instant he knew that his good intention disguised an evil desire. A minute before, he would have taken his oath that he was calling out of friendship for Sophus Petersen.

Standing in the street in broad daylight, he went through once more his experience on that terrible night, his own resolve to resist evil even to annihilation, and "the devil's" assurance that he would be made to serve evil unconsciously and against his will.

Was he really going mad? He dared not go to a doctor. Who could tell?—he might be sent to an asylum! And once there——! No, he must try to be calm. Of course it all came of the number on the door being the same as those cursed figures that had found their way on to the paper on that night of derangement.

But now he lacked courage to go in. However, he had to talk to somebody. Barnes? No, they would get on to dangerous subjects and that would excite him.

Katharina! She must have spoken to the riding-master by now. She was so brisk and healthy and straightforward, she would be able to lay all his morbid fancies.

He would go to 23 Gamle Kongevej, but by a roundabout way, to give himself time to calm down. . . .

When Dahl came in, he found Mrs. Sonne alone. He sat down facing her. It would compose his overwrought nerves if he made a confidant of somebody. And he began to tell her—not too directly, but still fairly transparently—of temptations he could not acknowledge as his own, but which nevertheless had power over him. And he saw that she understood him. She said that happened to most of those who tried to lead the life he aspired to. He must not be frightened into the belief that it was something unusual, peculiar to himself. It happened to the very best—to them above all others. She knew it. Yes, she knew it. Her triumphant joy broke out into a smile. A loss, of which she took no cognizance at the moment, tinged her proud smile with melancholy. Mingling with the maternal tenderness which streamed from her to him was a ruthless desire to hear more of his temptations and to imagine them in another.

But when she saw the expression of his eyes, spellbound by

the woman's smile that glowed upon her lips, she knew all she wanted.

There was no difference between his face and the other's. A desire, the confession of which she had just heard, was directed upon her.

When he raised his eyes to hers, and she saw their ascetic fire turn to a heavier glow, the resemblance was perfect. A dizzy happiness seized her; she felt it reach him; they rose simultaneously, clasped each other's hands, their thoughts were already one.

The door opened and a cheery "Good day" fell upon their ears like a song.

They released each other's hands, looked about them, as though they had been naked, and sought a hiding-place. Katharina did not approach. She stood as though lifeless.

Dahl tried to find a pretext for leaving, but felt that if he said anything it would only make the situation more abject. He contented himself with taking out his watch and nodding good-bye to both of them at once without looking at either.

After a pause so oppressive that Mrs. Sonne could scarcely breathe, Katharina said:

"What was the matter with him?"

Her voice had the threatening sound of a pistol being cocked.

Her sense of shame paralysed Mrs. Sonne and made her fall a victim to the ready lie, which presented itself with cruel ingenuity.

She gave a nervous laugh:

"I believe he's in love."

"Who with?" asked Katharina sharply.

Captain Sonne could not have examined a mendacious recruit more sternly.

"Who with?" repeated her mother, with the smile of a woman taking in her best friend. "Well—who do you think?"

The Serpent, who owes Eve a good turn for one she did him long ago, assisted her. Katharina believed, and went to her room. There she let loose her smile.

"My goodness, these old-fashioned mothers—they blush because young men fall in love with their daughters!"

"But what a man, to speak to the mother first and then run away from the daughter!"

"That fixes it—he shall learn to ride!"

Dahl walked down the street feeling abandoned by everything good. He no longer regarded himself as an insane victim of hallucinations. He *believed* that in that bewildering night he had actually seen and talked with one of the representatives of the spirits of evil. For here, where he had come for rescue, here, where he *knew* his thoughts had always been *pure*, even here he had found himself against his will in the service of evil. A good "equation" had in some incomprehensible way been transformed into a bad one.

Though he was in deep despair, there was somewhere within him a wicked desire to laugh at this result of confidential confession and sincere willingness to help. It was really grotesque! A pity they were disturbed!

He stopped. He found he was talking to himself, as though he were somebody else. There *was* another ego in him, which was trying to get the upper hand. It argued and explained, while "he himself" became more and more a prey to despair and fear, like a miserable little fellow going home from school side by side with a big bully who delights in tormenting him.

"The other one" became pressing: why the devil don't "the good powers" help you? What has happened to "God"? You want so much to be good, *specially* good in fact, God's *chosen instrument* in time to come, a positive channel for the divine love—then why doesn't it come to your aid? *Won't* it, or *can't* it?

Overwhelmed, almost benumbed by despair, he walked on listening. Is it myself speaking, or another? he thought.

Mrs. Sonne lives at No. 23, Mrs. Emilie Petersen at No. 13; those are the numbers. 13—23—9. You live at No. 9 and are on your way home.

He stopped and looked around. He found himself in the middle of the town. What would happen when he got home? "We don't do things by halves." He dared not go home. But he would have to some time. He turned down Amager-torv. There was no sense in all this. What could happen at home?

He crossed by the fountain. In the opposite direction came a tall lady in a grey hat. It was the same one he had forced to stand still one day, almost on this very spot.

In an instant he knew what was going to happen at home in No. 9. He did not *wish* it, but he *could* do nothing else.

A desperate rage seized him: if nothing good in heaven or earth would help him, he would give up struggling.

This was really an amusing proposition: the husband who trains his wife to be a medium—for another man's will.

He stopped her and asked if she would not go with him to see Miss Bang.

She hesitated and considered a moment, hadn't really thought of doing so, but found, all the same, that she had begun to walk with him.

Well, yes, then she could take Nanna home to tea; they would have to go at once, because Adolf and little Ingeborg were at home waiting for her.

Just as she was thinking he was a very silent companion, she felt his arm round her waist, impelling her along.

She looked at him, surprised and offended, and tried to free herself.

It was unnecessary, for he was not touching her, but walking along with both hands in his greatcoat pockets, looking on the ground as though in thought.

But she still felt an arm round her waist.

She got uneasy and would have liked to turn back; but then in a moment they would be at Nanna's. It was uncanny about that arm. Could it be because he wanted to put it there and was thinking intensively about it? She felt heavy and tired and, as a matter of fact, needed the support of the arm. There was the house, at the end of the street. If only they were there!

They were there. She could remember nothing of walking along the street.

She looked up in surprise and met his eyes, and then she knew that he intended her ill and had power over her.

"I'll go home after all," she said. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he said, taking off his hat, and went upstairs. He left the hall-door open, the door of his room too.

She was surprised and relieved to find herself mistaken. She had really believed he wanted to hypnotize her. It must have been because Adolf filled her head with all these experiments.

But now she was already halfway up the stairs! When she wanted to turn back, she felt that the arm was still there, drawing her up.

Now she was really frightened and would hurry in to Nanna—ring twice, so Nanna herself would come and open.

But the door *was* open, so she could not ring. The door of his room was also open.

Those two open doors were like a gulf into which she could not escape falling.

With her eyes stiffly fixed upon him, but without really knowing what she was doing, she went in.

Desire of sin on the part of one, regret which the other had to smother because it was not to be borne, plunged them both into an intoxication approaching madness.

XXXIX. The Professor Dines

SPRING had come with a sudden rush. Leaves were bursting out on every branch, waves of green foliage swayed caressingly along the shore of the little gleaming sound. Every garden was white with blossom; the bees hummed, drunken with sunshine and sweetness.

The Professor had walked into town. To-day he was hoodwinking himself—with the same sly smile as when he was quack-doctoring his neighbours out at Skrøbely.

There he had been born, but had soon run away, for everybody bored him to death. He matriculated and took his degree, but left Copenhagen, because the university curriculum and the professors and his fellow-students bored him worse than the country-folk.

So he went out into the world in search of adventures, and found as many as he could manage.

But one day he discovered that—according to his scale of measurement—he was within easy distance of the little island where he was born. Following, as ever, his inclination, he went there and walked out to his native village. “For Sale,” said a board on the house that had been his father’s.

He went in and bought it, furnished it, and sat down to consider what he wanted it for. He had a feeling that he didn’t exactly want, but *had* to do something with it. And with that feeling he stayed there.

One day, as he sat looking out of the window where he had sat as a boy, his eye was caught by a hedge behind a pond in a field on the other side of the road.

He sat for a couple of hours gazing at this hedge, until he had a feeling that it could talk, but that he could not hear it.

Next day he went into the field and sat under the hedge so as to be nearer. The field was ploughed, and he had an idea that it had been under the plough the very first time he had seen it or been in it.

He felt a desire to finger the soft brown mould, and he did

so. It gave him a strange sense both of old familiarity and of new foreboding. He had a feeling that now it was a case of not being "clever." There was a restful joy in simply being "poor in spirit." He remained in it till the joy had reached its full expansion. Then he got up and went home with it, carefully avoiding any inquiry into it.

Next day he again sat under the hedge.

Day after day he sat there and let the mould run through his fingers. The same feeling always returned, and each day it had grown. At last it reached far beyond him; he sat in the midst of it, not knowing whether originally it had belonged to him, to the field or to the hedge. All three now shared it.

It interested him to see how far it would grow if it were left to itself and if his whole being were centred upon it alone. There seemed to him to be adventurous possibilities in it, and he had always followed the call of adventure; but this was different from all others.

The hedge and the field kept him company in his pursuit; every day they showed him their faces more clearly.

He decided to keep on and see it out.

People saw him sitting there, passing the earth through his fingers, and had their own thoughts about it. For he was a learned man and must have found something strange in the composition of the earth.

The owner of the field began to have visions of a fortune after the Professor had found out what there was in his soil. It couldn't very well be gold, but it might be something "chemical."

The Professor still had a feeling that the hedge and the field could talk; at last he believed he was himself on the point of being able to hear them. He took special care that his own thoughts did not intrude. Thoughts have their use. In many adventures it is they that settle the matter. In others it is muscular force and lung-power. In this one he had to go by feeling.

He did so, and one day he heard. He heard the words "the Garden of Paradise."

And he saw it. It was the hedge and the field. *There it was.*

But when he tried to look out over the garden, it was *everywhere*. It was no fable: it had existed, and it existed still. It was the whole earth.

But the whole earth was not the Garden of Paradise. The earth concealed it—in its secret chamber, so to speak. But he could sit and look into it.

Into men too. He could see what they had to do with the Garden of Paradise. Within it Per Madsen and Mads Persen were angels, but outside they wore very queer disguises and little guessed that they were in fact angels—nor did they exactly behave as such.

But he could see what each particular one needed in order to come a little nearer to his angel and to the Garden of Paradise. . . .

Not all the Professor's adventures had been entirely innocent, and each of them had left traces which did not point directly to the Garden of Paradise. It happened sometimes that "the gate blew to" and he saw the earth in its shabby garment, when Mads was Mads and Per was Per and nothing more.

He accepted these dull days with patience; they were not usually long. But they came, and a dull day is a severe punishment to a man whose inner life is as rich as that of Paradise.

Now and then he would run short of patience and feel that he couldn't possibly stand Per Madsen and Mads Persen any longer. Then it was that he rang up the best hotel in the little town and struck terror into its kitchen—a poor substitute for his former travels and their mad whims.

To-day he was sitting in the room with the veranda, looking at the view—like Kipling's "time-expired soldier man," who leans over the rail of the transport and

"tells them over by myself
An' sometimes wonders if they're true,
For they was odd—most awful odd."

On these occasions the hotel had to do its best to provide dishes which might remind him more or less of the most various places and incidents in a most chequered life—a menu of the strangest composition, wherein many of the dishes were only for show; but the wines he tasted, a sip of each, just enough to give light wings to his fancy and bring the motley picture-book of his life nearer.

Then came the "psychological moment" when he began to laugh,

first at himself, for requiring all this foolery, then at the proprietor, who was bowing and fussing about, but would have put him down as a lunatic if he hadn't thought he was rolling in money. Then he started giving his orders in foreign languages till the proprietor's ears grew stiff; and finally he laughed again—at the folly of himself and everybody else, to the memory of which he had just been eating and drinking; laughed himself into the direct road to Paradise, paid his bill, and left.

He walked along the shore to a place where the water lay deep and dark under a steep bluff. He could go no farther that way. So he turned inland and strolled into a little wood, the last trees of which stood on the edge of the bluff with exposed roots hanging over the water. When he was tired he found a grassy spot in the wood, lay on his back, and took a siesta. . . .

Just as the Professor in the best dining-room had arrived at the "psychological moment," Bjerg the lottery collector in the café had made up his account over a bottle of Madeira. He was in complete harmony with himself. Everything came right for him. Her death had come, in fact, not a moment too soon. Too much unloveliness had crept into their relations latterly. A man ought to be careful about that when he had reached an age at which he has to admit that his best years are behind him. But they were too deeply committed with each other; it was no use breaking off. And then—well, it came right. She died—and her end was quite a nice one. There again she was fortunate.

When Helen, after her divorce, came to visit her home, everything looked almost the same as when Helen was a child, and her mother had no other thought but of looking after her.

And he had arranged everything admirably for Helen. After all, that was an item which weighed on the—er—good side. And even if he and her mother—well, what of it? we are but human and we didn't make ourselves. And anyhow it was all over now. Ah, well, it was death and not he that had put an end to it—but he was *pleased* that it was all over. It had been his *wish* that it should be done with—latterly. For Helen's sake. More particularly.

It was so nice to sit and look at her in her mother's home. She looked like an artless young girl. Absolutely. That had never been outside her home. Or exposed to anything.

And she was pretty; she had many admirers who would cer-

tainly like to take up with her. But she had absolutely no eyes for them.

This was remarkable, for so young and shapely a female body must be provided with senses. And she had been married too. Married to young Urup, of all people, and his love can't have been of a particularly spiritual kind. "We must try to keep her away from the young fellows of the town," he had said to her mother. And her mother was good at *that*, there was no denying it.

Well, then came the heart-failure all of a sudden that afternoon.

And now Helen had nobody but him. Bjerg almost had tears in his eyes when he thought of it. Only almost, for he had to tackle the practical side, really do something for Helen, who was completely knocked over by grief. He patted her on the shoulder and stroked her head and told her to leave everything to him. And in fact he buried her mother as charmingly and thoughtfully for her as if Helen had been a little girl whose doll was broken and was to be buried with all pomp and solemnity. He was so much taken up with his task that he quite forgot any personal cause for sorrow.

And in a way he had none. It *was* to have been ended anyhow.

He was looking after Helen now. Pure and undefiled as she had remained, she should not fall a prey to any young scamp. What sense have young men for innocence in women? It is only when one becomes rather more—h'm—settled down and calm that one has a taste for *that*.

Properly speaking, young women ought to prefer older men, who could *appreciate* them—by comparison with—h'm—to put it more correctly, who desired a *worthy* relationship, one might say an *innocent* relationship, to a certain extent. Life does not last for ever, and—afterwards—a fine evening to one's days is not a bad thing.

It would have to be founded on *trust*, and trust in him she did not lack.

He would propose either marriage or—hang it all! she had been the wife of young Urup and must know something of life!

He donned his top-coat and went to see Helen.

It was an age before the door was opened. He stood persistently waiting. She *must* be there. He felt so much in alliance with Providence, through all his good resolutions, that he simply could not imagine the slightest obstacle between him and

his goal. His feeling became almost religious. She *must* be there.

At last he heard her step, with a delightful sensation of rapture. He straightened his back, and his eyes shone with the only thing that could make them shine. . . .

Helen had been tidying the drawers of her mother's bureau. She had died so suddenly that there had been no time for giving any instructions. Helen herself had to find out all about it.

And to-day she had found out a good deal.

In a secret compartment of the bureau lay several bundles of letters. She set to work to read them with the idea that they might be from her father, whom she had never seen but always thought of wistfully.

They were not from her father.

Though who could tell? For she was brutally forced to change the bearings of her existence.

There were letters from a company director in Copenhagen, from Uncle Hans, from her father-in-law Urup, letters which in their shameless intimacy tore the veil from her mother's life.

Just as she had finished them Uncle Hans rang.

He saw by her face that something terrible had happened and asked what it was.

She pointed to the letters; he recognized his own and exclaimed with fervid sincerity: "Hell!"

When he saw her staring before her like one who feels she is about to lose her reason, he boldly plunged *in medias res* and said he understood how shocking this was; life was full of all sorts of foulness, but she must not think filth was the only thing in the world; one could rise above it; he himself had been in the mire, as she could see, unfortunately, though she ought to have been spared it. Letters ought always to be burnt. But she must not give up and plunge headlong into anything of the same sort. He had just been thinking of her in this connection and of himself—thinking that we human beings must strive *together* towards something—better and higher and—strengthen each other—and rejoice in each other—two and two—and no more—certainly no more—he had just been thinking——

He expounded to her what he had been thinking, but felt the ground slipping from under his feet.

Helen listened to him with a face of stone. Little by little it

began to twitch here and twitch there, and finally she broke into hysterical laughter, which made an end of Uncle Hans's eloquence.

He waited until he could stand no more of this insane laughter. But when he realized that she would go on laughing like that until she died of it, he ran home and locked his door. . . .

When the Professor awoke from his siesta, he did not know where he was. He might have been anywhere on earth, where there was grass and green woods. He was immersed in himself, and his age might have been anything at all.

Among the trees on the round knoll walked a woman, one of those in whose existence a youth of seventeen believes.

Now—he was seventeen and would follow at a distance and look at her.

He went a few steps, but then stopped. The woman was ill.

The careless joy vanished from his face as autumn sunshine is chased from a field. With a gesture as though throwing off his coat, he freed himself of every thought that might intervene between him and what he had to do. His whole frame expressed attention, both outward and inward, as though he were simultaneously observing the young woman and reading off an impression within himself. Meanwhile he stood motionless and no more occupied with himself than the beech beside him.

Suddenly he made a movement and his expression changed. He was like a hunter who had found the trail. Concealed behind the tree-trunks, he rapidly stole to a thicket. Once there, he broke into a run. He ran in a curve towards the bluff.

If anyone had known why he was running, he would have put him down as madder than when he was sitting among the bottles in the hotel dining-room.

On reaching the brushwood at the top of the bluff, he halted, waiting for her to appear in the open. Then he slipped behind her without a sound and followed her, so firmly resolved that she must not notice him that she was in fact deprived of the power of doing so.

She went straight on, looking neither to right nor left. When she reached the edge of the bluff, she jumped.

Two arms seized her. That they were human arms did not occur to her. She had no thought but of death.

But she felt that she was being carried.

The Professor let her gently slip to the ground. He still had

one arm about her waist; with the other he bent her head upon his shoulder.

He drew a deep breath and closed his eyes. For a minute he kept them closed; meanwhile his face was marked by tenderness and an intense effort of will. When he opened his eyes again, he was in the Garden of Paradise. Only two thoughts were allowed to live in him—that here was Paradise, and that in it he would lay the young woman to sleep.

Helen's head lay upon a shoulder she did not know and had no thought of knowing. From death she sank, as in a dream, into an unknown land, which was nevertheless made dear to her by her seeming to remember it. Her thoughts were asleep, but a deep peace filled her heart.

Gradually she became conscious of this peace and wondered at it. She thought she was with her father, with him whom she had never seen but often thought of wistfully.

His words and his voice seemed to confirm it:

"Sit down, my child, and tell me what has happened."

She looked up and recognized the Professor without remembering quite who he was.

Once, as a little girl, when she was afraid—or could it have been her father she was talking to then?—or had she only imagined her father like that? The voice too.

It sounded intimate, almost within herself:

"Tell me all about it."

She felt it was not her own will that spoke. It seemed to be this voice that gently drew the words out of her:

"My mother is dead—I saw some letters——"

She would have said more, or would have wept, but could do neither for wonder.

For he spoke to her as though he knew it all, as though he had stood by her side while she was reading the letters.

They sat under a white thorn in blossom; the white branches lay upon his shoulders and he looked as if he had just appeared out of the thorn to tell fairy-stories about all that might happen in the world. Nothing was quite real. His voice had a magic, imposing silence, like the voice of one telling stories on the edge of the bed, just before the hearer falls asleep.

He told her that life was hard for those who grew up without having had the protection of a home like that of her childhood. He went on talking about her home and the purity with which she

had been fenced about, described her home as she had believed it to be, spoke of it so naturally that these letters became distant and unreal as bad dreams from which she had awakened.

But they continually recurred to her, and at last she said it:

"But—but—the letters——"

Well, from those very letters she could judge of her mother's love for her and efforts to protect her, he said. Her mother perhaps was just one of those who had grown up unprotected. Evil has free play with those who know no better. And when once one has yielded to it inadvertently, it is difficult to free oneself from it entirely. It is like walking in mud, one's very efforts to get free may make one stick faster.

"Happy the ones who do not know this. Most people know it. Your mother knew it. Because she knew it, she was able to screen you.

"Look about you. Wherever you go, you meet people with stains of the mud they have stepped in. Nobody is pure.

"The world can only be rescued by a saviour. I do not know whether this thought was first born in men themselves, who—like your mother—were conscious of their sin, and God in answer to their prayers sent them his Son—or whether, as the Scriptures tell us, he himself understood and took compassion on the poor human beings and came down and helped them.

"But since then a man has not been judged according to his own little value; he has been saved by his effort. This is the straw the Saviour needs to be able to raise the drowning man.

"Your mother's effort you have seen. It is yourself. It is your own stainless life. You are your mother's straw. Take good care that you do not break it. For then she would have nothing but her letters.

"Your childhood's purity you must take with you through life. That is your mother's contribution.

"When you and she meet one day, it will be as each other's salvation."

Helen looked up at the Professor.

That day of the mission meeting came back to her clearly, when he had scorned and ill-treated the missionary. Uncle Hans had often laughed over it and said:

"He's an out-and-out freethinker, the rogue! What else would you expect?—he's a man of learning."

"But—" she said, "but—aren't you—an unbeliever?"

The Professor got up. When he spoke to her again, his tone was less intimate:

"Does it make God any less if I do not believe in him? Is the Saviour of less account if I deny him?"

"I might stand here and tell you what I believe and do not believe. But I won't. It doesn't concern you."

"You are not to live your life supported by the faith of another. What I have said to you is what you have yourself been thinking, without knowing it. Now you must do it for yourself. Think and live."

"You no longer have your mother. But you have her letters. Be glad that you have read them. And then burn them. She has protected you. Now it is your turn."

"Go home and begin. And never go to the bluff again."

He took her by the hand and went with her through the wood. When they came to the meadow which lies between the wood and the town, he dropped her hand, raised his hat, and walked into the country.

XL. In Love

NOW you can quite well come out for a ride," said Katharina. "Start wearing spurs next time in the riding-school, to get used to it. You've got on awfully quickly."

Her easy superiority would have annoyed Dahl if her pride at his having gone on "awfully quickly" had not been so charmingly frank.

He was himself surprised that he got on so well. He had a sense of having been turned about. His whole attention was forced outward by the horse and the riding-master.

He really felt almost a new man.

Katharina too thought he had "woken up"; she was pleased with her work.

"But do you know what?" she said. "To-day you have lots of time to see me all the way home. You're not so busy as all that. Mother thinks it so strange that you never come to see us now."

Dahl looked at her and quickly took his eyes away again.

There was that horrid gloomy expression back in his face! Why *wouldn't* he come home? There was something he was afraid of. But after what she had made of him already, she was not the girl to give up.

"What is it you're reading for, really?" she asked.

The question flustered him; it was the one of all others he was least prepared to answer.

"Well—as a matter of fact—up to now I've been reading theology," he said.

"Heavens!—you're not going to be a parson?" she exclaimed.

He couldn't help laughing at the shock it gave her. No, he wasn't going to be that.

No, as it happened, he was just considering the question of taking up something else.

It was a lie, but he didn't know that until he had said it, and then it became true—to the extent that he was able to answer without hesitation her next question:

"What is it going to be?"

"I think it'll be the educational course."

"That means M.A.—Ph.D.—Professor, doesn't it?" she asked.

"Yes, that is what it *may* lead to."

She seemed to be turning the matter over in her mind and nodded reflectively: "Haha."

He could not avoid feeling the strong propelling force there was in her. If he made up his mind to get engaged and married to her, he could scarcely avoid being M.A.—Ph.D.—and Professor. There would always be a full head of steam. He glanced at her. She was looking straight ahead. It was infectious. M.A.—Ph.D.—Professor—the career of a useful man. It lay before him like a long, fine road, asking to be followed. Beside him walked Katharina, asking the same. In that case perhaps she would go with him and eat the bread he earned.

Eat his bread! He stopped still, quite overwhelmed by a happy feeling of triumph. That she, a young, spirited, pretty girl, who could pick any man she chose, might be ready to put everything aside and be glad to eat the bread he earned!

He turned towards her, and the amazement of this question was so plainly to be read in his eyes that she dropped hers. But not before they had had time to answer a rapid "yes." He even had an idea that she had nodded, but was not sure of this.

They walked silently side by side. Their moods were transposed. She had become uneasy, uncertain of herself, and the blood came and went in her cheeks. He walked along, calm and happy, thinking of the road before him: M.A.—Ph.D.—Professor—and she willingly eating his bread. A bright and cheerful vision.

She was waiting in confusion for him to say something, at any rate, and watched the approach of her front door with suspense and exasperation. A thoroughly actual, live young woman.

He too was affected by the sight of the front door. She saw the gloom settle on his face, giving it the expression she hated.

What was the matter with him? Could he be afraid of Mother? Was this another trick of that damnable book she had lent him? It ought to be burnt! . . .

Dahl scarcely ventured to look at Mrs. Sonne as he shook hands with her. But that wouldn't do: he pulled himself together, looked up—and didn't know her.

Katharina saw his surprise and broke in:

"Yes, *isn't* it a shame of Mother to get herself up like that? Fixing her hair in that horrid way! She looks like an old woman.—You see, he hardly knew you."

Yes, it was the hair more than anything else. It was arranged so as to show a good deal of grey. But that was not all. Something had come over her face. It was so *done with*. Its possibilities were exhausted, and the consciousness of this had taken the place of all expectation of fresh experience. He could see the closing days of her life in it already. As it was now, it would continue to be, with no other change but a slow blanching and withering, while the eyes gradually took on the clear, neutral light of old age.

His sinful desire on that disordered afternoon seemed a preposterous fancy, even his memory of it was scarcely actual. It was dead, buried and forgotten; and the face before him seemed never to have guessed its existence.

On the other hand, he was aware of Katharina's living presence and felt its influence more and more strongly. Being accustomed to come in touch with the world through his feelings and let his thoughts come tumbling behind as they pleased, he placidly abandoned himself to her influence, and afterwards acknowledged its healthiness. . . .

He began to take his bearings in the world of men. He went to the University and found that the term was over and the examinations had begun. Very well, he would sit and listen to the kind of questions that were put; that was a beginning anyhow. He watched the candidates, pale from much reading, and entered their atmosphere in the same quiet, contemplative way as when he sat in the lowest form of the village-school and made friends with all the backs and necks, whose owners never knew the whole lesson. Now, as then, he was a few years behind, but that happened to everybody who changed from one course to another. He would make up for it by working harder next term.

He discovered the poetry of the daily grind. One day it took on human shape and walked up the steps of the University in company with a nervous candidate for examination. She stayed in the vestibule, doubtless not daring to go into the auditorium and witness the painful scene. Her eyes gazed helplessly at the closed door, her left hand was pressed against her heart, which hastened its beats as though to make short work of the

critical half-hour; her glance fell upon the engagement ring on her right hand, and then was raised again to the pitiless door. She drew a sigh and went to the window, leaning her forehead against the sill. She and Dahl were alone in the vestibule. He had forgotten to go in, from watching her anxiety.

He came a little nearer, his steps sounded so loud in the empty, silent vestibule; she started and looked up, he smiled kindly at her, and she made a poor attempt to smile back in thanks.

"It will be all right, you'll see," he said with conviction.

"Do you think so?" she asked, relieved by the thought that he must know her lover and be able to judge of his chances.

"Absolutely!" he answered. "If not, it would be a strange thing."

She looked so happy and grateful.

He slipped away quietly so as not to be there when her sweetheart came out.

In a few years' time it would be he who went inside, and perhaps Katharina who stood anxiously by the window. No, she wouldn't be anxious, she would be positive that he had learnt all he had to learn and that nothing could go wrong—and she would be justified, for being engaged to her and getting ploughed made an unthinkable combination. When she was about, one did one's daily work as a matter of course. He became convinced that she was necessary to him. This came about a few paces from her door, and he laughed at the thought: "Why, I'm already on the way to propose to her."

He looked at his watch. By this time the girl in the vestibule must have heard the result. Perhaps she was just saying: "One of your friends cheered me up so nicely and said it would be all right." He really liked her so much that he fervently hoped it was "all right." If she knew he was just going in to hear a "result," she would certainly wish him the same. It was extraordinarily easy to be kind and fond of one's fellow-creatures.

"You look so cheerful," said Katharina as soon as he came in, and her mother added:

"Yes, you really look as if you had something good in your pocket."

"Yes," he said, "I have a good proposal." It had occurred to him that moment. He would propose to Katharina a walk in the Deer Park, where they could be alone. But somehow the feeling in him was not strong enough to make him say it at once.

He sat down on the sofa beside Katharina and talked, adopting quite naturally an intimate tone, as if everything had turned out as it should—just as with the girl at the University. Happiness radiated from Katharina, so that it could be felt in the air right over by the window, where Mrs. Sonne was sitting. She perceived that an order, a rather lengthy order to the cook would be more than welcome, and she went out “to see about coffee and things.”

The young people chatted about nothing, so long as there were nothings to chat about. Neither of them knew which had moved closer to the other, nor which had been the first to stop talking. Certain it is that there was no room for anybody between them, and that the silence forced them to action.

He knew he had only to put his arm about her waist, and as soon as he thought of it, it seemed that her back complied of itself.

Strictly speaking, he was not thinking of her at all just then, only of what he was going to do, because he couldn't help it. It is easy to feel awkward at such a moment, and in order to get over this and find vent he stretched both arms a little, certain that when they dropped, the right arm would slip behind her. And she had no doubt of it either.

But it did not come. She looked at him in surprise, a little scared, as he jerked his arms to his sides, like a man who has just remembered something. What was the matter?

He asked himself the same question. It came on him the moment he raised his arms. A chilly feeling that this had happened once before. But when?

He turned towards her, wondering, and as he met her eyes, full of anxiety and longing, he knew.

Tine! It was that evening over again, when he stretched out his arms and found Tine in them without really being concerned about her in particular. It was desire disguised as fondness, nothing more.

This was the same as then. He knew now that he did not love Katharina, but was only in love with her—with her or with Tine or with the girl at the University. They were all equally dear to him.

But now he would have to go. She felt he wanted to get up, and she turned very pale.

“You had a proposal.” She had formed the sentence in her

thoughts and must have uttered it, for he answered, as he stood up:

"Yes—but I would rather put it off till another day—there's something—something I have to attend to."

"Something I have to attend to!" Never had she given her horse such a vicious cut of the whip.

"Then pray don't wait," she said.

"Thanks," said he, looking at his watch. "May I—I mean, will you say good-bye——?"

Mrs. Sonne came in at that moment. She looked from one to the other. She saw her own experience repeated. The whole scene from Rome.

When he had gone, the two women stood like statues, even their eyes said nothing.

It was Mrs. Sonne who woke last and seemed the more grieved. Katharina spoke with a strangely calm authority:

"Mother," she said, "that Italian priest—was he in love with you?"

"I think so," said Mrs. Sonne.

"And you?" asked Katharina.

Mrs. Sonne, ageing and grey, faced her daughter and answered frankly, but with the diffidence of a child: "Yes."

And with an attempt to assume the part of the elder, experienced woman who could give consolation, she added:

"I have gone through the same, my dear."

Katharina allowed the words to glance off her; she went to the writing-table and pointed to the portrait of the *cappellano*.

"Do you think it is right to put it there—by the side of Father's?"

With a guilty feeling towards her daughter, but none towards her husband, Mrs. Sonne answered:

"I don't know. The two feelings were so different. They had nothing to do with each other."

Katharina looked at her as though from a great distance; her eyes were cold, devoid of either friendship or enmity.

"How many feelings can one have in a single life?" she asked.

Mrs. Sonne did not answer. She felt humbled without recognizing any reason for it.

Katharina took the *cappellano's* portrait and put it into the bureau. "You can take it out when I'm not at home," she said.

There was something in her tone which made Mrs. Sonne

alarmed that her daughter might become a stranger. She went herself to the bureau and opened the drawer in which lay the red and the green manuscripts. She laid the portrait with them and locked the drawer.

She sat down and looked before her with a face in which there was no future for herself, but much concern for her daughter's.

XLI. Under the Beech

A YOUNG man whose object in life was not visible to the naked eye—no championship in games, no money-making career, but that “Kingdom of God” which is said to be within us—was walking in the Deer Park with a dull feeling of estrangement from the world. On leaving Katharina he was crushed with helpless sympathy. He would willingly have gone back and spoken the words she was waiting for, if it had been of any use. But her disappointment would have come sooner or later, for he had nothing to give her beyond a simple friendship and an amorousness which did not apply to her, but merely to the sex she belonged to.

This absorption in the other sex always carried him too far, to the detriment of the individual women he met. Though he had no evil designs, his conduct was no better than that of the Vissingrød miller’s man, whom Martine had held up as a warning long ago, the man who made a prey of erring and innocent alike.

He walked and walked without seeing beech or oak or bush, but simply laden with his own abandonment, till his brain grew dull and weary and there seemed to be no life left in him except in his legs, which continued to walk until suddenly brought to a stop by a sound—“crack!” He had trodden on a stick. “Crack!”—the sound possessed him, a familiar, intimate call from another stick he had trodden on and broken long ago. It came through the vanished years with an earnestness and persistence as though it had sounded and would sound for all eternity. He saw it and the place where it had lain in the dust of the road at home, the first stick he had made to crack. The sound continued to echo in his mind like a voice calling him, and at last he thought he heard his name: “Jens—Jens—Jens——” Then he had a feeling that his ego was gone, had slipped out through the days of his life and lay hidden—near at hand or far away—as impossible to find as Lillebror’s spade. He might just as well give up looking for it.

He gave up everything, himself above all, and sat down list-

lessly. He did not know he had been standing under a tree, but his back found it of its own accord and leaned against the stem. Before him lay the broken stick in the middle of a little patch of fine grey dust. The sun shone upon it and caught his eye.

The stick was stripped of its bark and browned by the sun. It had a bandy-legged bend in it—exactly like the last joint of his mother's forefinger. It lay quietly pointing in the blankness of the dust.

It fettered his thoughts to the sunny dust, as though all the world lay there. His eyes blinked wearily, but could not quit the brown stick and the grey, powdery dust it lay in. Even when they closed, it was lying there like a pointed finger.

"What is it pointing to?" he said. His mother laughed. She stood at the kitchen-door with the same teasing smile as the other day, when he had been hunting for the tin soldier that was in his hand all the time. "You can look and see," she said.

He looked, and seemed to fly through the air. "Now he'll soon go off," said the doctor, putting his long fingers against his chest. They were like the roots of a tree or the fingers of a goblin. He didn't like them. If he had known they would operate on him he wouldn't have spoken to the doctor about his nerves, for they were already getting better. Now this doctor with the root-like claws had him in his power. "Yes, he'll go off presently." He made an effort to say: "No, not yet," but could not get a word out. Luckily the old nurse shook her head and pointed with her bandy-legged finger to the little tray of grey powder: "He must have a little more yet." A younger doctor, who was so tall that his head would have been out of sight if he had not had a big mirror on his forehead, took a handful of coarse powder and sprinkled it on his nose. That was rather better, but he was not quite off yet, he was afraid of waking when they began to operate. He could understand what they were saying, but did not catch the words, for they only sounded like air humming in his ear. Especially when the pretty young nurse in the blue dress spoke, that was like the air itself. She stood by his head and he could feel her breath. "Now I'm slipping away," he thought, for now even the doctors were gone, he saw nothing but the root-like fingers and the round mirror, which had become the sun. "I believe he's gone," whispered the air. "Burn him now and let's see if he moves," said the roots. He waited anxiously, for he was conscious after all. "You can

wake him now," said the sun; "I've finished. All the madness is burnt out." "Thank God!" he thought. "Then I must have gone off all the same, as I noticed nothing. How long was it, I wonder? But I can feel I'm bleeding."—"Wash him," said the sun, "and then wake him."—The air came with a sponge and washed him out internally. "His face is bleeding," said the old nurse, Mother Earth.—"He can dry that himself when he wakes up," said the roots, striking one of his legs hard. He awoke just as they went out of the door, taking the whole hospital with them.

Above him was the broad dome of the beech's foliage. He knew it and did not know it. This was *the* beech, other beeches only resembled it as a lifeless photograph resembles living nature. "Now I have it," he thought; "this is the beech before the fall.—Then I must have died of the operation?"—But his face was bleeding and his leg pained him. He dried his face—saw that it was perspiration; he moved his leg, which had been lying across a root of the tree.

Sleep still lay in his limbs, but his thoughts began to awake and move according to their laws. He resisted. He wanted to lie floating gently on the vague swell of semiconsciousness. What he was experiencing was something he had once seen. He had himself stood outside and watched it. It was something to do with an eye. It was Lillebror's eye. Now he knew it: he was lying where Lillebror had lain that day when he saw him rise like a bubble from the bottomless depths of his eyes into the clear daylight.

He was only awake to his profound sense of peace. He knew he existed; beyond that his consciousness scarcely went. The world might easily have been created a moment ago. There were trees and bushes and grass—and himself. He was alone. When he had lain a little longer, a quarter of an hour, an hour, a year, he might wish that somebody would come, to whom he could say that everything was good, very good.

Somebody was actually coming—far too soon; he would have to wake up and move his legs.

He drew them away from the path, supported himself on his elbow, and looked up.

A young girl with golden-brown hair came walking along, wrapt in a web of day-dreams; he thought he could see them rippling about her figure, like the golden-brown curls on her forehead.

When close to him, she stopped a moment. No, she did not

stand still, but she paused and looked down into his eyes, as though seeking something.

But how long an instant can last! At the most, she had paused in her stride, and yet he thought she had been standing there a long while, looking and seeking, and had gone on with a suppressed cry of joy, like one who has found what she was looking for, whether a small thing or a great.

Only then did it occur to him to follow her with his eyes.

Her white dress was already disappearing far away at the bend of the path. When it was gone, it seemed to him that it must have been really blue. In any case, he had a blue dress plainly before his eyes. It seemed inseparably connected with the simple, gentle, deep joy which rose within him. Not merely connected with it, but the cause of it. A little blue dress with good magic in it. Why exactly blue and little, when it had been white and grown up?

He bowed his head with a quiet smile that nobody should see. It *was* blue, and he was sure there was a dimple on her cheek, a dimple full of sunshine like the patch of dust at his feet. A patch of sunshine on the earth, which brightened all space, a patch of sunshine on the floor, which gladdened all the room—Hansine's blue dress, little Hansine's bright summer blue.

Had she been like Hansine, then? He tried to recall the girl's face, but Hansine's childish features passed into it; he could only remember the eyes, and they were her own, like no other's, but reminding him of what was nearest of all to him. They looked down into his and found what they were seeking: the home from which we came and to which we shall return, the imperishable *Now*, in which the mind, the heart, the beech before the fall bear no marks of transient hours, days or years.

She had seen everything in him—as he in Lillebror—seen it and taken it with her, and would never let go of it. The thing is so small, its impression is so great that it can never be wiped out. There was one besides himself who knew it. They were two. Even if they never met, they were two. It helped him to know that. Never would he come so near to anyone as in that instant when she saw his inmost being, the naked life within him, and knew that she saw it, and knew that he saw she saw it.

He got up. Along that path she had gone. He would not go that way. A childish folly, which seemed full of wisdom, told him that that way *had* been gone. She had seen to that. He

laughed at his foolish wisdom, but had no doubt of its profound truth.

He turned towards home and walked the whole way. And no desire of meeting her arose in his mind. That imperishable instant continued to dwell in him, the instant in which his naked life lay bare and felt the sunshine of her soul.

XLII. The Councillor

HE had a feeling of having been born again. He could begin his life from the beginning. All he had experienced since he had grown up only half concerned him, like memories of another, unsuccessful existence. It had lost all importance except as a warning. His errors were wiped out, not in their effects on others—in this respect he began his new life in debt—but as regards himself. He had obtained forgiveness of sins and had arrived at purity and innocence of mind. Hereafter this would grow with him. If he could succeed in protecting and strengthening it, he would always be the man he acknowledged himself to be.

He was accustomed to associate the idea of the growth of the soul with religion. But he was not a Christian, and he had learnt to fear emotional excitement. He kept away from the *cappellano's* Catholic mysticism.

But among his associates was one whose simple eye shone with increasing brightness. This was Sophus Petersen. There was no excitement about him, but a calm, sure advance.

Dahl began to ask him questions, and Petersen explained that he was following the theosophical methods of thought-discipline. "The thing is, however, always to know what you are thinking about, and never to think about anything but what you intend." Through theosophy one learned the ancient Indian methods of thought-training, and there was, moreover, a secret, esoteric school, "in which, however, you get *direct* instruction."

Petersen laid a stress upon "direct" which left no doubt of its meaning "direct from the mahatmas." It was, however, his aim to obtain admission to this school when he had proved himself worthy, that is, entirely capable of keeping away harmful thoughts.

The preliminary training, however, might well be learnt in the outer, exoteric theosophical community.

Dahl thought he would like to know the nature of this training, and asked how one became a member of the Theosophical Society.

You did that by applying to the president of the Danish Lodge.

Petersen mentioned a Councillor of State, whose name was known in connection with one or two important municipal undertakings.

Dahl thought it over for a while. One day he made himself as smart as he could and presented himself at the Councillor's front door.

It was a long time before the bell was answered, but at last he heard the clattering steps of somebody who had not had time to put his shoes on properly. The door opened, and a little white-haired man thrust his head out with the grimace of one hard of hearing, before he came forward in the doorway.

Dahl had not expected to find a footman of this description. His trousers were all knee and only came down to his ankles; his coat was worn, and green where it wasn't stained. In the neck-band of his shirt sat a bone stud like a hermit in the wilderness. There were no cuffs to the shirt either. No wonder there was a sour expression about the man's mouth, as though life had not been kind to him.

Dahl asked if he could see the Councillor. The old man examined him critically, turned his back, and trotted in front.

"Come this way, please."

The slippers flapped along the corridor at a jog-trot; through an open door Dahl had a glimpse of wealth and luxury. The old man was already waiting at the end of the passage, and he showed Dahl into a room, or rather a den.

"Come in," he said, going in with him and sitting down.

Dahl looked about him and made a note of the furniture: a table, two chairs, a deal cupboard, a nail with an old hat on it, a tobacco-pipe without a bowl. It did not give him a favourable idea of the theosophical fraternity to see this pauper and his den in close contact with all the Councillor's magnificence. They might at least have given the old fellow a cast-off tie.

"What was it you wanted?"

The voice plucked Dahl out of his meditations; he stared at the man in astonishment and saw in a second that he was the Councillor himself: now he was aware of the old man's Diogenes face, his mighty crown, his broad forehead with its harmonious wrinkles and its serene but unfathomable peace, and his eyes, which were practical and on the spot and at the same time dreamy and obscure, and finally his mouth, marked by all that can befall and stir a man: firm and flexible, full of expressions of mildness and harshness, cordial joy and cynical derision.

Dahl came out with his wish to join the Theosophical Society. The Councillor asked doubtfully:

"What do you expect to find in theosophy?"

Dahl was not prepared for the question, but answered instinctively, perhaps prompted by the impression the Councillor's face had made on him:

"Peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

The Councillor's look of hesitation and scrutiny cleared into one of benevolence. He sat perfectly motionless, and about his head lay a solemn silence, almost a silence of death.

"Peace and joy in the Holy Spirit," he repeated slowly. "Then I bid you a hearty welcome. More than that is not to be attained in this world—or in any other. *Εἰρήνην ἀφίημι ὑμῖν, εἰρήνην τὴν ἐμὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν.* 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.' No, there is no more than that."

He paused for a moment and continued in a more matter-of-fact tone:

"You are coming to a religious community in order to find in it support and guidance. But do not forget that what you are looking for lies hidden in your own life—and not in a book or in the creed of a clique. For the grace of God is a living force passing all understanding, but churches and communities are the work of the devil.—Now I will enrol you in ours. May I have your name and address? I will then send in your application and you will receive in due course your diploma of membership signed by the president of the Society at Adyar in India."

He took a note of the name and then began to chat about University studies and practical affairs in an odd, cynical jargon very unlike the lofty, eternal calm that had marked his demeanour when he spoke of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The door opened and a white-haired lady came in cautiously, rustling with silk.

"I only wanted to know if you were at home," she said.

The Councillor sent her a sidelong glance.

"Yes, I'm sitting here," he said dryly. "But I'm going out in a minute."

Dahl felt he ought to take his leave.

"Are you going downtown?" asked the Councillor. "That was my wife who looked in, but I thought you didn't care to be introduced."

Yes, Dahl was going downtown.

"Then we can go together," said the Councillor. "I've only got to put on a pair of shoes—they're in this cupboard—and another coat." He took out one which presumably he considered better than the greenish one. "Oh, yes, by the way, a collar," he said on discovering that Dahl was staring at the lone stud in his neck-band.

The collar was clean enough, but it had to go without a tie.

On reaching the street the Councillor took Dahl's arm.

"Now beware of us when you come to meetings of the Lodge," he said. "Don't lose yourself in raptures over us. Live your own life. Follow your own impulses. Don't go and be an orthodox dogmatic theosophist. Read their books, but read them critically. For the things they write about may be the living water of life right enough, but the thoughts and the language are only their own stuff. And no doubt we're brothers the whole lot of us, but that doesn't oblige us to swallow each other's bad breath—either physically or spiritually. I tell you this because we have just as many followers of the letter in our community as the Christians have in their church; and because I don't attend the meetings myself any more, so I shan't have a chance of warning you."

"What is your reason for not attending the meetings any more, sir?" asked Dahl.

"Because I won't let them turn me into a prophet. I got up the Lodge, because I felt inclined to tell my workmen something of what I've got out of life. It may be a fine thing for their leaders to teach them to ask for higher wages and less work and to hate their employers who give in to them—and, in fact, to wipe their boots on their sense of duty generally. I'm not saying anything against that. All I say is that it isn't enough to make people valuable and happy.

"Well, but then we began to get more members. You know, people who were far too clever and enlightened to believe in God and Jesus and the Bible—of course the newspapers are much better. But now these same people sit there believing every word and syllable Madame Blavatsky has written, simply because it's so obscure that they can't understand a word of it. And now, God help me, they've begun to swallow my commentaries raw. I've had enough."

They had reached Raadhusplads and the Councillor was steering straight for the fashionable promenade. Dahl was not

quite happy about it. He was no snob, but all the same he didn't particularly want his fellow-students to meet him arm-in-arm with the owner of that hat and coat and especially those trousers.

They did not meet any of his acquaintance, but plenty of the Councillor's. A whole host of tall hats were respectfully taken off as they passed.

The Councillor gave Dahl a sidelong glance.

"You're looking at my clothes," he said. "Well, I dare say I ought to get a new suit—if only for the sake of the people who have to bow to me."

"It's not your clothes but yourself, sir, they bow to," said Dahl.

"Oh, do you think so? No, there isn't an idea or a feeling in me that they care a curse about. But it's very nice of 'em to take off their hats to my cheque-book. Well, here's the bank. I've got to go in and cash a cheque."

"May I ask you one thing, sir?" said Dahl. "Isn't there an esoteric school in the Theosophical Society?"

The Councillor was already at the top of the steps; he came down again with a rush.

"You don't want to go in for that? What do you want with it?"

Dahl said something about spiritual development.

"Spiritual development!" repeated the other. "Why, damn it, life's right in front of your nose and it'll give you all the spiritual development you want. Lead a practical and useful life, and lead it in such a way that everything you turn your hand to becomes a spiritual action. That's a lot better than sitting and looking at your navel and practising artificial breathing.

"I dare say there are some who are fitted for being yogis. Whether *you're* one of them I don't know, and I'm pretty sure you don't know either. But I know a good many esoterics that in my humble *exoteric* opinion are simply not fitted. They 'study,' and they train themselves, till they go daft. They speculate and 'meditate,' till at last they can't see life itself for imaginary causes of life. They gradually get their nervous system into such a state that I'm damned if they can breathe in a collection of ordinary mortals. They can't go past a butcher's shop without going through a lot of mysterious tomfoolery to get rid of the lower 'elemental spirits' that are supposed to gorge themselves on the bloody atmosphere.

"I shouldn't like to see you turn into one of those. You are

young and have talent. There's a fine life before you. Live it as well and as purely as you can. And let God in his mercy give you what he has in store. But don't go putting in claims of your own as to when, where and how much——

"Ha!" The last exclamation was due to a gentleman in a frock-coat who was bearing down on them. The Councillor cast a look at the door of the bank, but it was too late to escape. He introduced Mr. Skaarup, secretary in a Government office, and Dahl to each other.

Skaarup asked if the Councillor really intended to give up conducting the work of the Theosophical Lodge.

"Yes," said the Councillor.

Skaarup expressed his deep regret, but concluded by asking:

"Have you any objection to *my* carrying on the meetings in future?"

The old man looked at him critically.

"*Heaps,*" he answered; "but I'm afraid I can't stop you. Good-bye."

He disappeared through the door of the bank and Dahl was left with Skaarup, who asked if he was a member and then attached himself to him, zealously propounding the mysteries of theosophy in a kaleidoscopic hotchpotch which made Dahl understand why the Councillor had given up.

At parting, Skaarup gave Dahl his address and gushingly invited him to come and study theosophy with him.

Dahl thanked him, but was firmly resolved not to go.

XLIII. A Released Convict

A THUNDER-STORM had passed over the neighborhood; the sky was rent and the waters poured down. The earth had drunk all it could and left the rest to stand in pools, as deep as ponds. Trees and bushes were still under the stress of the storm, but began to show signs of recovery. The calm of liberation pervaded all things.

The Professor sat at his window watching a callous crow, which with disturbing cries flew into the willow by the hedge. There it settled down, and for the next quarter of an hour nothing happened.

Then there was a clicking of the garden-gate, and Holger Enke came slowly up the path, his clogged boots sinking deep at every step.

His sentence had been remitted. His conduct in prison had been exceptionally good and he had been emphatically recommended for pardon. To everybody's surprise, he had returned home to the parish where his crime had been committed. He had been there a week or so and had been round to most of the farmers to ask for work. Now he was scraping the mud off his boots on the Professor's steps and taking his time over it. At last he knocked and opened the door, but came no farther than the passage.

"May I come in?"

The Professor nodded.

Holger began pulling off his clog-soled boots. He did not notice that the Professor's eyes were searching his person all the while, feeling it over, as it were, both inside and out. When Holger looked up he only met a blank expression and heard a drawling "Sit down."

The language was that of the town, but the tone was dilatory and rustic.

Holger made no move.

"Well—I suppose you know who I am."

The Professor did not answer, but looked at Holger as one looks at a casual labourer, who presumably hasn't come to worry

one for nothing and who ought to say what he has to say and be done with it.

Holger's business slipped out of his mouth before he could remember the introductory speech he had composed on the way.

"Will you lend me the price of my journey to Jutland?"

"What do you want in Jutland?"

Holger looked at his feet.

"I can't get any work here.—I suppose it's because I've been in jail."

"Sit down," said the Professor.

Holger shot a doubtful glance at him and remained standing.

"Sit down, damn it," said the Professor in a tone of irritated reprimand.

Holger sat down, because he was told to.

"Will you lend me the money?"

"No."

The refusal sounded indifferent, but certainly irrevocable; Holger's head made a little gesture of admission:

"Well—no!" His eyes were fixed on a knot in the floor-boards. "But you were the only one—and I should have paid it back all right."

Something nudged his arm. It was a cigar-box which the Professor was holding out to him. Holger looked from the box to the Professor and from the Professor to the box without forming any reasonable idea of his intention.

"Take a cigar, confound you, when I offer you one," said the Professor.

Holger obeyed. He sat with the cigar between his fingers, staring at it.

"Bite off the end and spit it out," said the Professor.

Holger bit, and the end shot out into the middle of the room, where it lay, looking huge. Of course he ought to have sent it into a spittoon. He was just looking about for one, when a light blazed before his eyes. The Professor had struck a match and was holding it to the end of Holger's cigar.

"Pull," said he.

Something gave a jerk inside Holger, he looked quickly up at the Professor's face, the jerk came again, this time so violently that it startled him, shook his big shoulders, went to his head, and burst out of his mouth in a spluttering laugh which spurted over the Professor's hand and put out the match.

He gave a contrite glance at the Professor, met his eyes, struggled, but could not free himself from that droll look which positively *worked* on him, went right into him and tickled him, till he was dissolved in immoderate laughter like a schoolboy.

The Professor seated himself on the opposite side of the table. Holger stopped laughing and looked before him in a silence which grew more and more oppressive. At last he said in a dull, expressionless tone:

"So that was—laughing. I'd forgotten—I didn't know I could—— You oughtn't to have done that, Professor. It hurts when it's over."

"I have work for you," said the Professor.

"You?"

"Yes. I want to have a quickset hedge between the garden and the field instead of the stone wall. You can pull down the stones, break them up, and cart them away."

Holger got up.

"Well—you know I've been in jail, so——"

"That's just the good thing about it," said the Professor.

Holger gave a start. There was something, perhaps not downright brutal, but at any rate carelessly rakish in the other's tone. And the man seemed to mean it too, whether you could call it brutal or not, exactly as if—as if—— He stared at the Professor, who was looking at him with an indefinable smile that you couldn't put much trust in. He felt ashamed of what he was thinking, but couldn't help it. It was, above all, the mocking, closed smile that did it.

"Out with it," said the Professor.

Holger turned red with confusion. "What?"

"What you were thinking."

"Why, do you *know* it?" His mouth stood open with bewilderment.

"No, but it might amuse me to hear it."

Holger hesitated a moment, then drew himself up and said frankly:

"I'm not going to take your pay if I've had such thoughts—only for a moment—without your knowing it.

"You looked like one of those I came across—over there. A plaguy clever fellow, but—as he said himself—not clever enough to be *too* clever for them. There was something in what you said and in the way—yes, in the way you're standing now—which

made me—well, I may just as well tell you honestly, the thought flashed through my head that you looked like a man who had kept clear of jail because you were too clever for them. So now you know it.”

The Professor took his eyes off Holger and turned his back. When his face came round again, the eyes blinked unsteadily, but there was a defiant ring in his voice.

“If that was the case—if I had got off because I was cleverer than the rest of you, who were fools enough to get pinched—then perhaps you wouldn’t work for me?”

“Is it true?” said Holger, almost in a whisper.

The Professor looked him up and down superciliously.

“If I haven’t told anybody else, you could scarcely expect me to tell you. After your nice behaviour over there, you’d soon send word to one of your friends the slave-drivers on the other side of the water.—But perhaps you don’t want to work here?”

Holger regarded him doubtfully.

“I can’t make you out,” he said. “There’s nobody knows anything about you, and you beat me. But whoever you are, and whatever you may have done or not done in foreign parts, I’m not the one to judge anybody.”

“Then you’ll come to-morrow,” said the Professor. “You can have your meals here, so you can stay the whole day.”

“All right,” said Holger, and went.

Next morning he was at the stone wall and kept at work till evening.

They had dinner together, sitting one on each side of the table. Not a word was exchanged. Now and then Holger stole a searching look across the dish, but never met the Professor’s eyes, which had been fitful and uneasy ever since their last conversation. It was a good thing, all the same, that he didn’t talk.

One day Holger noticed a change and found the Professor’s eyes on him the whole time.

“What does he want with me?” he thought. “I can see by his looks that he thinks I’m a stupid fool—just as the other one did—over there.” Funnily enough, he felt quite comfortable about it. He breathed a deep sigh.

“What are you thinking about?” asked the Professor.

“About jail,” said Holger, lost in memories. “It was a good place to be.”

The Professor leaned back in his chair and rubbed his hands,

like a horse-dealer who had done a good stroke of business and is not worried with moral scruples.

"It seems to me, though," he said, "that one can be just as comfortable outside."

"Yes, *here*," said Holger. He turned red and added: "Excuse me. I didn't mean any harm by that."

"Oh, you didn't?" said the Professor. "But suppose now you found me out—would you peach on me?"

"No," replied Holger. "I don't believe you've done anything either. But I can't make up my mind about you. And they say you've been all over the world. And I suppose there are lots of places where they're not so particular what you do."

"Just so," said the Professor. "I wasn't always so old as I am now, but I've never, in any part of the world, done anything that came under the *law*—of *that* country."

They looked at each other; their eyes met for a second in confidential comradeship. Then Holger got up and went to the stone wall. The Professor saw that he handled his pick and crow-bar with more cheerfulness than usual.

But next morning his face was closed. The heavy lids hung down over his eyes and the Professor thought there could be no light either within him or without.

The work did not go at the usual pace. Holger stood wool-gathering for long spells at a time, and now and then put his hand to his head as though it hurt him. Then he would suddenly seize his pickaxe and go for the stones as if he had to shift the whole wall in an instant.

The Professor sat still and watched him, like a fisherman keeping his eye on the float.

Suddenly he jumped up with a start. The pick had fallen out of Holger's hands. He stood holding his head and swaying to and fro. He did not fall, but staggered towards an old apple-tree, groping with his arms, got hold of a branch, and laid his head against it.

The Professor ran out, took him in his arms, and turned him round. "Come here," he said.

Holger's eyes looked like those of a dying man; he collapsed in the arms of the Professor, who dragged him in, feeling as if he had a corpse to deal with.

He got him into a chair, with his arms on the table; his head lay heavily on his arms.

"Holger!" he said, and felt how his voice lost itself in the room without reaching Holger. He thought for a moment and then struck the table hard.

"Hullo!" He shouted so loud that it made an old vase ring on the shelf.

Holger lifted his head and saw the Professor's outstretched hand fly into the air. He knew he was going to get a licking—not a blow like a man, but a box on the ears fit for a schoolboy. His left elbow went up from old habit, he ducked his head, and, as he did so, heard the Professor's voice, commanding obedience:

"Cry, you rascal! Will you cry when I tell you!"

At the word "cry" an obedient gulp came deep down in Holger and the tears began to gush out of him, as the water gushes out of a pump, which does not think of what it is doing, but simply provides water because somebody is pumping.

All at once his tears were checked, as though in surprise at himself. Then they began again more violently than before, and now it was Holger himself that was crying, like a man in despair who knows what he is crying for.

He continued to weep, until he heard a sound, a noise unfamiliar to his ear. He looked about him and grasped that it was not a noise he had heard, but the profound stillness of the room.

In this dense stillness, and not to be distinguished from it, sat the Professor; and to him, or to the stillness and to himself, Holger began to speak.

"I have known this once before. I felt it when I had done it and went in to make an end of myself.

"But then they began asking me *why* I had done it. And then my wits stood still.

"I can't ever have done that to her on purpose. But they kept on with their questions.

"They wanted to make me *explain*; and they asked me questions till my wits stood still.

"They said I was a murderer. 'Yes,' said I, 'I was dead set on it that I'd give him a fearful death.'

"'But you didn't do that,' they said. 'No,' said I, and my wits stood still. For what I was going to do was to break every bone in his body and take time over it. And there he was with them all safe and sound.

"Then they went on asking me about what I *had* done.

"How could I explain, when it was all impossible?"

"So they sent me to jail for life.

"Jail. The most gruesome place on earth; how I had shuddered at the very name of it when I was a boy! Now I was to go there myself. My wits stood still at the thought. And yet it seemed like a matter of course. It was something heavy I'd got to carry, and the heavier the things they heaped on my shoulders, the better it was."

He paused for a while, sitting motionless and looking before him.

"Aye, it must be that," he said at last; "it must be like that."

"How?" asked the Professor cautiously.

"My mother had a clock at home," said Holger, without looking at him or changing his position; "an old Bornholm clock that stood against the wall. When I was a little boy I half thought it was alive; it looked something like my grandmother. It seemed to be talking to itself when it ticked, and when it struck, it sang like Grandmother, who used to go about humming a hymn-tune.

"Then one day it stopped. At five-and-twenty past ten. It stopped there for years."

He was silent for a moment, lost in reflections which went far beyond the clock. He nodded to himself, almost imperceptibly, as he said:

"It was the same clock all right, but the works didn't go, so it stuck there stupidly pointing to the same figures.

"But one day a clock-maker came and opened it, and did something to the works. And he turned it back to nine. 'Now we'll put it back,' he said; 'then it'll be up with us. There, now we know where we are.'—I was sitting there, looking on.

"All I can think of is that my wits were not able to bear it when they didn't let me die.

"For we were all criminals, of course, all that were in there. And I was one of the worst, because I was there for life. That was quite fair. But beyond that—no, my wits had come to a standstill. . . .

"And then all at once they came and said I was to be set free."

"I read the report about you," said the Professor. "It was an uncommonly handsome testimony to exceptionally good conduct."

"I've seen it myself in a paper, some of it," said Holger, "and I don't understand how they can make up that sort of thing. The

whole thing amounts to such a little. I took my punishment and *wanted* it. The others took their punishment and *didn't* want it. That's all the difference. But of course—to those in charge and people who have to do with them, it might easily look like something more.

"Well, then I was let out and came back here—I can't think why. To think I couldn't guess how folks would take it! It must have been because I was used to living among criminals, and the warders were used to dealing with convicts. And all that time everything was at a standstill with me.—Well, when I found they wouldn't give me work here, even then I didn't see any other reason except that they didn't want to have anything to do with a man who had been in jail."

He heaved a deep sigh. His weariness from the long fit of weeping, which had made his speech monotonous and calm, was passing off. He began to rock backwards and forwards on his chair.

"It was a little girl that did it," he said. "She was playing out on the road, and I'd have liked to talk to her: I've always been fond of little ones like that."

He was silent for a minute or so, and then continued in a low, heart-rending tone:

"She was afraid of me. She ran home.

"Her mother was standing just inside the garden-gate.

"And then I caught sight of the eyes of both of them. And I don't know how it was, for I didn't hear their voices, but all the same I heard them whisper quite plainly: 'That's the man who killed the young girl.'

"It wasn't anything in my own thoughts, for I should never have called *her* 'the young girl.'

"I don't know how I could have gone on like that all those years, unless it was that my wits stood still. Now I see it all. I see it in all the eyes I meet. And I see it with my own, and I know that my wits will go to pieces over it.

"And I'm only longing for that to happen."

"So as to be free?" said the Professor.

"It's not to be borne," said Holger. "Look at these hands. It was they that did it. I could burn everything they've touched, as something accursed. But the hands themselves, they're part of me.

"And even if I cut them off, it'll be *me* that's done it. You

can see the proof of that, for if not, the hands would wither, the blood wouldn't run into them. But *my* blood runs into them.

"And even if I took a knife and shed my own blood, because I wouldn't have it in me—it would still be me that had done it. Through life eternal it'll always be me that has done it.

"I am eternally damned."

"Don't you believe in a saviour?" essayed the Professor.

"Yes, for those who *can* be saved."

"Even the thief on the cross could be saved."

"Yes, because he could pray for it. Can I clasp *these* hands and pray for salvation?

"I *am* judged. I know it, for the judgment is part of myself. The judgment upon what I have done."

"Don't you think the thief had judged himself before he prayed?"

"I don't know what the thief had done, but at any rate he hadn't laid hands on *her*."

"No," said the Professor; "even the thief would have spared her.

"Do you remember her dimples? Do you remember her eyes?"

Holger groaned like a beast that is slaughtered. The Professor went on:

"Do you believe she will suffer eternally for what you did to her here on earth?"

Holger looked up at him without a sign of comprehension.

"You know, what you did would never have happened if she hadn't gone wrong first," said the Professor quietly.

Holger's heavy eyelids drooped and he said within himself:

"Now I remember—it was that that made me do—the other thing."

The Professor had risen and now stood close to Holger. His voice subtly adapted itself to his words:

"It turned out to be her fault that you became a criminal. She did not *intend* it. But she will never have peace in her own conscience until *you* have found peace.

"It is she who is to save you, Holger."

"Well, but the *punishment*, the punishment for what I have done——"

"That you must take here on earth, where you did wrong. You took your punishment in jail and took it *willingly*."

You are not to go away to a place where nobody knows what you have done, and where you will only be tormented when you can't escape remembering. You are to remain here and see your crime reflected in everybody's eyes. Every day you will be confronted with it anew."

"It will be harder, but shall I gain anything by that?"

"In the same way as when you're carrying flour up to the loft. A whole sack at a time is heavier than a half. But you gain by it.—You have destroyed a life here on earth. You are to let your own life on earth be destroyed—and by your own *will*."

"But if I go mad and lose my wits, I shan't have borne my life through to the end. And how can I keep my wits?—I daren't pray to any god to help me."

"I watched you once on the playground many years ago," said the Professor; "one day when you were not far off, losing your wits, and had nearly killed a boy. Then you heard a voice call 'No!' It was hers.—Can you remember her voice?"

Holger looked at the Professor with great round eyes. They slowly filled with tears, till at last he could hardly see; but he kept on staring, as though it was not his eyes at all that he saw with.

Quietly, but firmly, as though delivering a message from a supramundane power, the Professor said:

"Every time you are about to lose your wits, you will hear that voice and that 'No!' And, as you did then, you will always obey. It is she who is to save you, Holger."

Holger got up, still with his eyes on the Professor.

"There are some who think," he said slowly, "that you can see into heaven and—no," he suddenly broke off and turned away; "you shan't tell me anything. What you have said about her, my heart tells me is true. I don't need more than that."

He went out to his work.

Now and then he stopped and gazed into space, like a man who saw his hard lot and took it upon him; then toiled on, stopped again, saw yet more suffering, and took it upon him. Thus he went on.

At the end of the day he came up to the Professor. His manner was changed. The look of heavy simplicity that had always strayed like a lost dog about his face, was gone. A hard hand had brought the whole man under the sway of a single thought. It looked as if the vast strength of his body, the violent

impulses of his temper, and the soft lenity of his heart had been combined into a purpose which was incapable of swerving a hair's-breadth from its path.

He looked at the Professor, who dropped his eyes before all this strength confronting him.

"I know what I think," said Holger, "but I should like to know whether this was what you had in your mind:

"That little slip she made—became a grave sin through my fault, and therefore it must be expiated through me before she can find perfect peace.

"Was that what you had in mind, too?"

"Yes."

Holger looked before him. His head bent in a slow nod that made up his account.

"Then no affliction shall be too great for me. I shall follow up my punishment like a sleuth-hound wherever it may lead me, until I drop." . . .

Children and grown-up people stood outside their gates in the mild evening air. With all their eyes upon him, the ex-convict walked home to the ramshackle cabin he had leased from the parish, which was well aware that money is the only thing unpolluted in the world, preserving its value no matter whose hands it has been in.

Outside the door he paused and looked up the road.

"Little children shrink from me," he said half aloud, "and they daren't go past my house alone in the evening. I'm made an example of to scare them: 'Take care you don't grow up like Holger Enke! If you don't behave we'll send you to Holger Enke, and he'll kill you.'"

He entered his door, not like one seeking rest after his day's work.

XLIV. The Meeting

DAHL had met Mr. Skaarup in Kongens Nytorv and could not get out of going home with him. Skaarup had asked for his help with a difficult article in an English theosophical review.

It was a long visit, for there was no end to what Skaarup had to say about theosophy. With untiring industry he had erected a metaphysical screen around himself, made up from the writings of Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Besant. Within this he sat well protected from all life's influences: he lived in a vacuum where the sounds of life died out.

But at last they got to the English essay and plodded through it. Skaarup went out and asked for coffee, came back and resumed his talk about the only thing that filled his mind: the ideas of life after death, karma and reincarnation which his imagination had constructed from his reading of theosophical literature.

Dahl's head ached, he gave up trying to follow and fell into a doze, which Skaarup took for meditation. He did not discover that anybody had brought in coffee until Skaarup introduced him:

"My daughter Mai—Mr. Dahl."

He raised his eyes and forgot to stand up.

She stood with the tray in her hands, looking down into his eyes, as though seeking something—exactly as that day under the beech in the Deer Park. With a subdued look of joy, as though she had found what she was looking for, she put the tray down on the table, and he stood up and gave her his hand.

A smile passed over both their faces, and he was on the point of saying: "So it was *here* we were to meet," as though they had arranged or known that sooner or later they would meet.

What a long, mute, living moment before they let go each other's hands and she left the room!

Skaarup resumed his harangue about the "secret doctrine"; Dahl sat wrapt in happiness outside his metaphysical screen, hearing nothing, but seeing all the more—a dimple, golden-brown curls, a tussore dress with a velvet band at the throat, slender

white fingers. Only her eyes he could not see: they were *in* him, she had left them behind when she stood looking into his.

Skaarup got hoarse and stopped talking. Dahl got up to go. They shook hands, both feeling happy, one at having found a good listener, the other with all the world. Skaarup expressed a wish to learn more English, Dahl felt a corresponding desire to teach him. Skaarup took down a book on "Clairvoyance" and thought they might use it for their lessons. The book was a thick one, and Dahl said yes.

Then he left, so full of Mai that he didn't even look if she was in the drawing-room as he went through. Afterwards he knew she was not there, and he was glad of it. That would have been too much all at once, and would have taken away his deep feeling of security. It seemed nonsensical, but so it was. . . .

Next day he went out to look for a coach. He was going to stay in town through the vacation and prepare for the coming term, so that he would not have to begin at the very beginning.

He read industriously. On fixed days he went to Skaarup's and translated "Clairvoyance," got a glimpse of Mai and a cup of coffee.

After a while he hit upon arriving a little before Skaarup came home from the office. Then Mai was always to be found in the drawing-room and they could talk to each other. Only a little and not for long. From their hushed voices it sounded like trifles that were in the thoughts of each. A little smile showed how much there was that could not yet be put into words, things which might well be seen, but not heard nor wittingly hinted at.

XLV. Mai

MAI SKAARUP sat at the piano in what ought to have been a mood of dejection. She had condemned her music.

She could not make out the others, her parents, her music-master, or Mr. Bjarnöe—"the seraph," as Mr. Barnes called him. How could they say she had talent! The lifeless stuff she gave them!

Talent—ah, yes! She picked up all her music and stuffed it into the bottom of the cabinet.

She went to the window and looked out. She loved the bright daylight.

How wonderful life was! If one had an ardent and lasting wish, it was fulfilled. And when it was fulfilled, it turned out to be something different and far better than what one wished.

The eyes of her dreams she had found under a beech in the Deer Park. That showed that life could be as it ought to be. That was how her girl friend's eyes ought to look; when she met her she would know her by them. She wished it so intensely that she felt it *must* be.

And one day she really saw them again in Father's study. They were a little different now. When she saw them under the tree, she discovered life as it ought to be. When they met her in the study she discovered herself, and for the first time she was pleased with the picture of Mai Skaarup which she saw in the other's eyes. She remembered how old she was, and felt a quiet dignity which was at once entirely new and yet had always dwelt in her. It did not matter so much about the girl friend now.

He came every other day. It almost seemed like a romance she was making up, for it all happened as she wanted it: she hoped he would come a little too soon, and the very next time he came—a good deal too soon, and she had to entertain him until Father came in.

When the hour approached she would sometimes think: "It's

only my fancy that he's coming." When it was over she was jubilantly sure of his existence.

"But I have an idea that I have always known him," she thought one day; "how can that be?" At that moment she felt herself blushing and knew how it was. She had always been dreaming. Her dreams, which had slept like birds in a cage, now fluttered into the open and swarmed about him. A partition had been broken down; there was no difference between life and dreaming.

From that day it was imperative to be with him, to talk to him and hear him talk, but from that same day it became incredibly difficult to find anything to say. But to-day she would question him straight out, for it would be such good fun really to know something about one another.

And when he came she asked him straight out, in a way that showed she had had it in her head all day:

"Won't you tell me something about yourself?"

He felt that their intimacy now became obvious, and he wished her to know everything about him.

But when he turned his attention upon his own life to reveal to her all he knew about it, it seemed to him suddenly that there was hardly anything to say.

"I should like to tell you everything," he said, "but, properly speaking, *I* have not lived so very long. It seems strange now when I look into myself and try to answer your question. Because now I discover that I have been absent a long time. *I* have. For I don't think it has been myself at all, these last years, but someone who was trying to find me. Several years have gone by which seem to have nothing to do with me at all. It sounds foolish."

"Not to me," said Mai. "It is the same with me. I have not been awake since I went to school. Since then I have been walking in my sleep. I believe you and I have been alike, but tell me all the same."

"What am I to tell?" he said with a smile. "Once upon a time there was a boy whose name was Jens—and that was me. One day he disappeared and a fellow came whose name was Dahl—and I *thought* it was me. One fine day he fell asleep, and a young man woke up, whose name was Jens—and that is me, sitting here. All the rest, I believe, is some ugly stuff I have dreamt. I have never been able to get on with that fellow Dahl."

"Tell me a little about him all the same."

"I can't do that without telling you a little about the boy," he said.

"I want to hear about him above *all*," she said.

"There isn't much to be said about the boy," he began. "There was nothing to keep me away from the heaven that dwelt within me. I walked in Paradise.

"But one day it was closed and bolted, and from that day I was an outlaw and felt the need of saving my soul. I turned religious. I studied theology. Theology drove me out of Christianity. But I still had a soul to be saved. I was seeking for something. I thought it was God. I know now it was myself.

"It must have been. For *now* that I have come back to myself, there is nothing to keep me away from my own heaven. I need no religion—the *one* thing I needed before.

"Perhaps religiousness is the effort of a discordant mind towards harmony, and religions are built upon the confessions of men who strove and attained. For my own part, I seem to have lived through—and beyond—the whole Christian religion. I have walked in a paradise of innocence, where I had need of no religion. I was thrust out, together with an Eve, and hurled down to earth. I experienced the death of Abel, for I felt that he whom I acknowledged as myself was dead. I had myself killed him. We all have a fratricide within us.

"Since that time I have been alone, whomever I may have associated with. And it is not good for man to be alone.

"But one day I awoke and saw the beech before the fall, as I remembered it when I was a boy. Somebody went past, and I looked up into a human eye which was seeking the same life as I. Since that day I have not been alone. I see now that if mankind is driven out of Paradise with Eve, it returns there with the Madonna. Through her comes the child to save mankind. So it has been with me. The boy has come back. The man worships the Madonna.

"I have no more to say. I sought after God. If God is love, then God is where I am now, and there is nothing in me that I need conceal. From any god. Nor from any man. Nor from you. What I now feel, I can acknowledge with every part of my being. Heaven and earth are one, and there is no difference between body and soul."

Mai got up. He moved close to her.

At that moment he heard a step in the hall. As he turned to see who was coming, he chanced to touch her arm. When he saw her blush and felt the slight quivering of her hand, he knew more surely than before that soul and body were one.

But the door opened and Skaarup came in.

"This will be our last lesson for the present," he said. "I've just heard that I shall have to go to Stockholm on official business."

"For long?" asked Dahl.

"No, only a week or so," said Skaarup, taking Dahl into his room.

After the lesson he accompanied Dahl—much against his wish—as far as the front door.

XLVI. A Singular Lady

OLD Martha knocked at the door and looked in.

"It's Mr. Byarnes," she said.

Dahl was surprised. He hadn't seen Barnes for a long time and wasn't expecting him. They had quietly drifted away from each other; it seemed quite natural that they no longer met.

Barnes came in, nodded, and sat down. His expression was one of coolness, almost antipathy, but Dahl had a feeling that this reserved manner concealed a deep emotion, which was presumably the cause of Barnes' having prevailed upon himself to visit him. And it must have cost him an effort, for obviously he could scarcely bring himself to speak.

"You look surprised to see me here," he said at last. "To tell you the truth, I'm surprised myself. I really like you less and less.

"Perhaps it's the result of a little clasp of the hand you once gave me," he went on; "one day when I'd just been telling you something I couldn't tell anyone else—not any rational person, at any rate."

He gave a little laugh, half melancholy, half teasing.

"Either it's that little clasp of the hand, the first sign that I had found a friend, which still possesses me, or else it must be because I don't count you as a rational person."

He paused for a moment, wrapt in himself as though no one were present. He was filled with a wondering joy, which showed in his face. Dahl had never seen him like this.

But when he looked up and his eyes fell upon Dahl, he changed entirely. It was a reserved, barely civil fellow-student who spoke.

"As it happens, I've come to you in a roundabout way. I've been to see the Councillor. It was about a new member for the Theosophical Society. No, not myself; I've done with that rubbish. I believe I told you once that I was engaged in some investigations. Here's a book, if you care to read it. It's an

exposure of Madame Blavatsky's mahatma frauds. And here's another, exposing her disciple Mr. Judge's forgeries of mahatma letters."

"And yet you've been to see the Councillor about a new member?"

"Yes."

"I can't make you out," said Dahl.

"I can't either."

"Did the Councillor know about these exposures?" asked Dahl after a pause.

"Yes. But he didn't worry about them. He said he had never seen people get hold of anything sacred without desecrating it as soon as they'd been kneeling to it for five minutes. But as for the application papers, I might take them to Skaarup, as he himself had nothing to do with it now. So I went to Skaarup."

"He's not at home," said Dahl.

"No, he's in Stockholm, but thank goodness I didn't know that."

He paused and looked at the floor.

"At Skaarup's I met a lady," he said.

Dahl gave a start.

"Miss Mai?" he asked.

"No. A lady from America. A relation of Mrs. Skaarup's lives in California near this lady, and when he heard she was making a trip to Europe he asked her to go and see Mrs. Skaarup. I think they were at school together.—But Mrs. Skaarup doesn't speak English. The lady is Norwegian-born, so she speaks some Norwegian, but that doesn't help Mrs. Skaarup much, because it's American-Norwegian. So I interpreted. And finally I went for a walk with the lady to show her the town.

"Now I know, after all, why I came to see you. For if I tell you any more, you'll think I've gone mad. And you are the only person in whom that view doesn't trouble me, since I myself am inclined to regard you as half cracked. I am *so* far sane.

"Well, then, I took the lady into town. Mrs. Skaarup thought she was a theosophist. I don't know why, but she thought so. However, she's *not*.

"Now, I've long been wallowing in metaphysical ruminations, the theosophists' and Hegel's and everybody else's, so I longed to discuss them with a stranger. Besides, I find English easiest for talking abstractions. But I couldn't get a chance. Every

time I tried to get off a piece of—what I will call wisdom, she broke in with a question—how many palaces there were in Copenhagen, whether the King had any children besides the Crown Prince, and so on. I got dead tired of listening to all these foolish questions. I gave her up, let metaphysics go to the winds, its proper place, and kept my mouth shut. Then she shut hers too, and we walked and enjoyed ourselves.

“We went out along Langelinje, and there I saw that the water was blue.

“It’s nothing to laugh at, for I have never seen such a living blue. Not since the day I lay on my back in a haycock and thought in all innocence that I saw into heaven.

“The cutters lay rocking gently on the blue sound. Their sails were white.

“‘That’s the way ships sail to America,’ said she.

“I got the idiotic idea that she was not talking of the America of geography at all, but of that fresh, untouched America we dreamed of when we were boys and read Cooper. I looked at the white sails and the blue sound, and I said to the fresh breeze I felt in my mind:

“‘Yes, that’s the way to America.’

“I don’t remember ever before taking such a liking to a person. I didn’t think very much about her, but I was glad she was there, and I was ready to walk and walk—to the world’s end. As it was, we went as far as we could—to the end of the mole. There I turned my back to her and looked along the coast, and thought, as I did so, that life on earth could be extraordinarily beautiful.

“Then I heard her voice, right in my back:

“‘Yes—life on earth can be beautiful.’

“I turned round, and she stood looking at me, as if that was what we had been talking about all the time. But I hadn’t said a word.

“As I stood there looking into her eyes, I had a feeling that I was—psychically—stark naked; that even those corners of me which I keep best concealed were fully lighted up. I blushed—both at my own weak character and at my silly feeling that she knew all. ‘What the devil is there about her?’ I thought. She laughed. ‘I can tell you about myself, if you like,’ she said.”

He paused and looked critically at Dahl.

“Well, now comes the most absurd part,” he said. “I’ll tell it, if only for the sake of hearing how silly it sounds in the telling.

She was born in Norway, she said. Her father was a poor man, who emigrated to America while she was still a child. She was blissfully ignorant, had barely learnt to read and write—not particularly well, as I have seen. They went out West, and she had no teachers but earth and sky and the things that grew. She lived what she called a natural life. When she was thirty, her eyes were opened—that is what she called it—and she was made an instrument of higher powers. She now has a school of mental hygiene in Los Angeles.

“I can’t bring myself to repeat all she said about the ‘higher powers’ and their efforts to assist mankind. On my lips it would sound like madness, but when she says it, you think you can see it. The ‘spiritual powers’ are many, she said, and her school is attended by people whose nature is akin to the powers she serves. But that is not the only place where people are to be found who are under the protection of her ‘powers.’ On her travels she has met several, and has always received injunctions to approach them. I don’t know whether you can picture me so, but I stood like a child, wondering whether I was one of those under the protection of her ‘powers,’ and I hadn’t the pluck to ask her, but she answered all the same: ‘You are, Mr. Barnes. You were *sent* to Skaarup’s to-day, and I am to stay here some time for your sake—and especially for the sake of another.’

“I was *sent* there—yes, by the Councillor, who knew nothing. It sounds like the talk of a charlatan; I can tell that. But what’s the use of that, if I *believe* it? I am powerless not to. I don’t know what it is about her that paralyses my critical sense and makes me believe against my will. I can recall her face clearly, and I can’t see anything remarkable about it. She has a gold filling in her left eye-tooth; I discovered that when she laughed at one of my most elaborate English phrases. Her face is strong and pure, but so neutral that you can’t really seize upon any conspicuous quality in it. Unless—well, her eyes sometimes have a clear-cut glint, as though she had put a new lens into them. There is a golden gleam about her person, caused by I don’t know what. Perhaps it is due to the queer metallic ring of her voice and especially her laugh, which makes me think all the time of gold, ‘the red, red gold.’

“Goodness knows who the other one is, for whose sake she is going to stay some time.

“We went into the King’s Gardens and sat down. There she

told me all about myself and my endeavours, where they were right and where they were wrong. And I felt that everything was as she said."

"Did the Councillor know anything about her?" asked Dahl.

"If so, he would surely have mentioned her," said Barnes.

"No one would ignore such an extraordinary being, knowing that one was liable to meet her."

He got up and looked out of the window.

"By the way, do you know who it was applying to join the Theosophical Society?"

He turned and watched Dahl narrowly as he said:

"It was Katharina Sonne."

"Katharina——!" Dahl looked up in surprise. "Katharina—has she—I didn't know she was interested in that kind of thing."

"Nor did I," said Barnes hesitatingly, "until one day she asked whether I saw anything of you, and I answered that I never saw you, now that you had turned theosophist. Then she asked what kind of thing theosophy was, and when I'd explained it she asked me to get her into the Theosophical Society. I told her about the exposures, but she said she would go into the question herself."

"I've been talking to her mother."

Dahl sent him a questioning glance.

"Yes," said Barnes. "May I ask you something? Katharina is unhappy. You don't know how she is looking. I asked her mother what was the matter with her, and Mrs. Sonne—well, she believes her daughter has had the same experience with you as she herself had with the *cappellano* in Rome. And Katharina is not getting over it as she did.—May I ask you, was it for religious reasons that you—that you took yourself off that day? Because in that case you ought to be shut up in a madhouse."

"It was not," said Dahl.

Barnes was silent for a moment.

"And now she's joining the Theosophical Society so as to meet you!—Poor girl, she's fighting for her life."

"How can you—how *can* you not care about her?"

"I *do* care about her," said Dahl, "and I'm bitterly sorry for her, but—but I can't give her what she expects."

"Why?" said Barnes.

Dahl looked up and Barnes met his eyes.

"Oh, that's it!" he said. "Your pitiless happiness shows in your eyes. Poor Katharina!"

"You're fond of her yourself," said Dahl. "You're in love with Katharina, Barnes."

"In love?" repeated Barnes. "In love?—I don't know. I only know that she doesn't care for me, and that I always do what she asks me, even when I know it's bad for her."

XLVII. Miss Dale

MAI SKAARUP sat waiting for Miss Dale. She thought of the day her mother had come and asked her to go into the study and entertain an American lady, who had brought a note from Mother's old schoolfellow in California. As a matter of duty she had gone in, and the strange lady rose and came towards her.

At first she saw nothing but her eyes, which were calmly directed upon her and came nearer and nearer from far away, so that she fancied this lady had come from the end of the world simply and solely to meet her. Already she felt that they were old acquaintances from some forgotten past, and before they had said a word her head lay on Miss Dale's bosom and Miss Dale's arm was about her neck.

Soon they sat laughing and talking as if they had known each other always, and she thought her own Danish sounded just as odd as Miss Dale's American-Norwegian.

Life accommodated itself kindly to her needs and wishes. Even her father's journey to Stockholm came just at that time to suit her. Otherwise he would have annexed Miss Dale at once on account of her clairvoyance and would then have imagined that he too could read people's thoughts.

But now she owned Miss Dale entirely; she came every day, and though she was over forty Mai did not notice the difference in their ages. Miss Dale took a lively interest in everything that concerned Mai, entered completely into her little world, and admitted her to her own fairyland.

To think that anything so strange could come about so naturally! It made her laugh to recall the first time it happened. She thought it was Miss Dale's sitting so still that had made her sleepy.

She had come into the room while Miss Dale was writing.

"May I sit with you a little?" she asked.

"Yes, if you can keep quite still," said Miss Dale. "I'm writ-

ing letters to my people in California. I'm telling them that I shall be here longer than I thought."

Mai seated herself in an arm-chair and waited.

It was a long letter, and the room was so quiet. Mai's eyelids were drooping, as in the days when her old nurse told her stories.

Her eyes closed in an unspeakably joyful peace which welled up in her heart. She wished she could stop thinking, so that there would be more room for this wonderful, living peace, which was increasing in volume. She wished she could abandon herself to it entirely, fall asleep in it. "If I fall asleep now," she thought, "then I really believe I shall find myself among the angels." She pulled herself together, for she was just dropping off, though she was not alone in the room. She looked hastily for Miss Dale.

She was no longer at the writing-table. She must have got up very quietly, for she was now sitting on the other side of the table, keeping an eye on Mai. When Mai looked at her, she smiled:

"Well, Miss Mai—how do you feel?"

Mai could see that Miss Dale knew what a lovely time she was having. So then it was all right if she gave herself up to it. She leaned back and thought she was going off to sleep.

Then she discovered that she was awake as she had never been before. She sat in an arm-chair in Father's study, by the side of the big table. She knew that quite well. And on the opposite side of the table sat Miss Dale. But all the joy of heaven was in Mai, and her consciousness, which was not thinking but only living and observing, reached far beyond its usual limits. Heaven and the room were equally real and were both equally near to her.

When she began to wonder about this and to ask herself how it was possible, heaven gradually vanished, but the feeling of peace and felicity remained in her heart. She turned her face to Miss Dale, who still had an eye on her, like a mother seeing her child awake.

"Well, Mai—how do you feel?" she said as before.

Mai whispered gratefully: "What a blessed moment!"

Miss Dale smiled: "How long do you think you were in bliss?"

Mai thought to herself: "A quarter of an hour, I suppose."

"Do you know what the time was when you came in?" asked Miss Dale.

"Yes," said Mai; "it was five minutes past two." She looked at her wrist-watch and stared speechlessly at Miss Dale.

The watch showed a quarter to four.

Miss Dale laughed quietly: "Heavenly time and earthly time don't keep pace with one another."

"*Was* it heaven?" asked Mai. She could not doubt it, but would gladly hear it confirmed by an earthly voice.

"It *was*," said Miss Dale, "so far as your eyes can see it."

"I *saw* nothing," said Mai; "I only *knew*—although," she added a moment after, "I had a feeling as though I saw a living, shining substance, which was everywhere, and which descended into me."

"Well—it *was* a substance," said Miss Dale. "It *is* there always. Otherwise you could not live. But it sometimes happens that a pure soul may receive a certain volume of this heavenly substance and feel it—almost *see* it, in fact. This substance which you saw is what your soul is clothed in when it is no longer on earth. It is what the angels are clothed in."

"Then there *are* angels?" said Mai. It did not occur to her to doubt Miss Dale's explanation.

"There are," said Miss Dale.

"Do you see them?"

"I see them."

And Miss Dale began telling Mai about the celestial world which had been revealed to her eyes when she was thirty. While she was speaking, Mai *knew* that it was so; so near did she come to seeing it herself.

"You *almost* see it when I tell you," said Miss Dale. "You manage better than Mr. Barnes; he believes while I am speaking; afterwards he doesn't know whether to believe or not. He's in a great puzzle." She laughed. "Mr. Barnes is full of speculations. They take him away from life."

"Yes," said Mai. She suddenly understood Barnes, as though she saw clean through him.

Altogether she had good sight when she was with Miss Dale. How clearly she saw her home all at once! Of course she had seen it always, but never been clear about it.

Strange that Father could not see it himself! Did he never wonder what had become of the happy look in Mother's face?

No, for he was always so sure about the right thing. The right thing was what he preached, and he never guessed that every

virtue that met with his approval became a scourge for his household. But Mai would one day be able to open his eyes.

There was a ring of the bell. Her face brightened; it must be Miss Dale; she was always punctual.

A minute later they were sitting together in the study, and heaven and earth were again in contact. . . .

Meanwhile Dahl was on his way to the Skaarups'. He had had a bad night, and his few snatches of sleep had been haunted by a superstitious fear that he was to lose Mai. It seemed an omen that Skaarup had entered the room just at the moment when they knew they loved one another. Perhaps they would never have a chance of telling each other. Mai might be forced to go away. Skaarup might be transferred immediately on his return from Stockholm.

At last he could bear it no longer; he had to go there. He could say he had come to borrow a book. If only he could get a moment alone with Mai, they would be engaged.

She came out and opened the door. His superstitious fear became almost a certainty. She appeared with a great joy in her face and started in confusion, as though she did not know him. It was only a second, then she seized his hand in evident delight and drew him quickly through the hall.

"Come," she said, "you must come in too."

Two things surprised him. She who the other day had blushed and trembled at a casual touch now seized his hand frankly, and certainly without sharing the quiverings he felt right up his arm; and her joy at their meeting was of a different nature from his. It was not warm and open, as it had been.

"You must come in too." How affectionately she stressed the word "you." But, all the same, that was not how a girl spoke when she expected a proposal.

On reaching Skaarup's study, she introduced them:

"Mr. Dahl—Miss Dale."

This must be the lady Barnes had talked about. Yes, he saw the gold filling when she smiled.

"Your name is Dahl too? That's really my name, but in America it had been turned into Dale."

She took his hand in a decidedly personal but markedly neutral way; he had the impression of one who was reluctant either to

give or to receive. But her face was friendly, vigilant, observant. A strict but perfectly natural purity was stamped on all her features. She could harbour no thought that needed concealment. But there was a pitiless clarity in her face which made him wish he had nothing to be ashamed of.

After a brief glance, which made him think of what Barnes had said about her being able to put new lenses into her eyes, she turned to Mai and asked if she had finished the dress she was making the other day. Mai, who had seated herself in joyful anticipation, looked surprised and a little disappointed, but answered that she had not finished it yet.

"I myself am no good at dressmaking," said Miss Dale. "But I can do dirty work, scrubbing, scouring, washing. I'm good at that. I learned all that when we were living on the prairie."

"Were you still living on the prairie when you became a clairvoyante?" asked Mai, who *would* go back to what they were talking of before Dahl arrived.

Miss Dale hesitated a moment.

"Well—I was," she said.

Immediately afterwards she started to talk about housekeeping. She spoke with intelligence and decision, like an American whose only object in life was to be practical. She was an expert at pickling and preserving.

"We get things done quickly in America," she said. "We're wide-awake. People in Denmark are half asleep. It's a great thing to be wide-awake. On the other hand, people in Denmark are more at peace, they know how to rest, they're not nervous and restless like Americans."

"I was asleep right up to the day you came," said Mai. "Oh, no, I forgot, I woke up just before." Her eyes sought Dahl's in a little smile, which Miss Dale caught. "I woke up one day in the Deer Park."

"You saw nothing you needed there, Mai," said Miss Dale seriously. "Now you are awake and you will always be so."

She began to chat about the Danish railways, which were so awfully unpunctual.

Dahl was not interested in the traffic question; he fell into a reverie and wondered at Barnes' losing his balance over this practical American. Had Barnes been dreaming, or had she actually talked to him about "spiritual powers" in the same way

as she was now talking about making jam and about trains which now and then arrived on time—"by the favour of Providence"?

Suddenly he felt her eyes on him and heard her laugh:

"Mr. Dahl is thinking about Mr. Barnes," she said to Mai.

"Yes—I really was," Dahl admitted.

"Have you talked to him—about me?" asked Miss Dale.

"Yes—he told me he had met you."

She laughed. "Mr. Barnes doesn't know what to make of me. He has a good nature, but his thoughts are all over the place, where they ought not to be. I should like to take him with me to California and put him right."

"I wish you would take me too," said Mai.

Dahl felt a stab at his heart. Did Miss Dale mean more to her than he did? It sounded so, but now she was looking at him with a smile which told him not to be sorry.

Miss Dale's eyes rested seriously for a while on Mai's face. When at last she answered, he heard her voice sound for the first time like other people's. He had not thought of it before, but now it dawned on him that it had the same quality as the sounds of nature, which are not moved to benevolence or hostility by the moods of men. But when she answered Mai a gentle warmth came into her voice, and it sounded like an affectionate admission when she said:

"I should be glad to have you with me, Mai."

She still kept her eyes on her. Dahl felt an inexplicable fear; when the expression of Miss Dale's face gradually changed, his fear passed into wonder. She seemed to be looking up to Mai.

Mai sighed. "It would make me happy—but then I can't leave Mother. What shall I do, Miss Dale? I simply can't imagine your not being here!"

"I am not leaving here yet," said Miss Dale.

Dahl could not make out why she said it so seriously. Mai did not notice it, she was so keen on finding out.

"How long will you stay?"

Miss Dale smiled. "Perhaps as long as you want me."

"That'll be for ever," said Mai.

Miss Dale made no answer.

"Till I can *see* the angels," said Mai, laughing.

"Perhaps," replied Miss Dale quietly.

"It must indeed be an experience to see an angel," said Dahl. Miss Dale said nothing, as though she did not wish to pursue the

subject. But Dahl thought that if she had talked freely about it to Barnes, she might well do the same with him and Mai.

"Barnes thinks you are here for a definite purpose," he said tentatively.

"Does he mean here in Denmark, or here on earth?" she asked.

"Both, I expect."

She looked at him a moment and answered evasively:

"Well, we are all here for a definite reason."

"Do you believe everybody is born for a definite reason?"

"Everybody."

"That reason is not easy to find."

She did not answer. Dahl continued:

"Take those who die soon after birth.—I myself had a brother. I was near to heaven when I was with him. I was a child myself then, but I can never forget him. He died before life had any meaning for him."

"Who says that life was to have a meaning for *him*?" said Miss Dale.

"For whom else?"

"From what you have just said, it had a meaning for *you*," she said. And as he looked up at her, struck with wonder, she continued:

"You were talking about seeing one of the angels of heaven. You ought not to aim too much at that. You ought rather to take care that the angels you see with your eyes here on earth acquire their full meaning in your life. The full meaning, and *the right one*."

Her words touched the deepest chords in his being; he put aside his criticism and asked candidly:

"Do you mind telling me more clearly what you mean?"

She hesitated an instant and then said:

"Well—it sometimes happens—and not so rarely as people think—that one who has nothing to learn here on earth, one who already *is* an angel, is born in order to live here for a time, because no one who sees such a soul can escape feeling good and being good. An innocence surrounds such a soul, which causes innocence to germinate in those about it."

"Oh, Miss Dale," exclaimed Mai, "you are one of those angels yourself!"

Miss Dale shook her head.

"No. I am a big, robust human being. I come after the angels

have gone home, to tell people how the longing an angel has awakened within them may become the breath of life. I know all that a person can feel, even though I have no part in it, and because I know, I am able to warn. The angels themselves, who come here on their brief visits, do not instruct, do not teach, they simply *are*. And because they have been here, no one who knew them can forget the best within himself. They make the air mild: they pass through the world like a beam of sunshine."

Dahl started. He had a clear vision of a patch of sunlight on the schoolroom floor.

"It is strange that you should say just that—a beam of sunshine," said he. "Once when I was a child I used that expression of a little girl. It was to Barnes. He declared it was owing to her that there was no roughness on the school playground. In fact, he said that if there were no creatures like her, everybody would go to hell."

"Had Mr. Barnes such good sight when he was a child?" said Miss Dale. "Ah, I thought as much. Now his eyes are confused by too many things."

"The joiner's little Hansine was hardly an angel," said Dahl with a sorrowful smile. "She had a sad fate and a terrible death. *That* at least cannot have been good for anybody."

"How do you know that?" said Miss Dale seriously. "Have you seen all the results of her life and her death?"

He looked at her inquiringly, and she continued:

"Of course I didn't know the little girl you speak of. But possibly it was necessary for her to take upon herself a cruel death for reasons which we cannot see, unless we know what it led to in others."

Dahl shook his head, and Miss Dale went on:

"On the other hand, it *may* be that the evil powers have succeeded."

"The evil powers?"

"If people could see them at work, if their eyes had not been given blinkers, they would *go mad* with terror of life."

The recollection of a distracted night made Dahl shudder.

"Do you really believe such powers exist?" he asked.

"I see them," she answered calmly.

"You *see* them?"

"Yes."

There was a short silence. He was beginning to understand

Barnes. There was something in her manner which almost made it impossible to doubt her words. She was just as calm and natural in speaking of "the powers" as when she was talking about dressmaking and preserving and scrubbing floors, but there was in her a condensation of force, as though she was herself one of "the powers."

"I don't as a rule like talking to people about these things," she said, "except when I *know* I *must* talk about them. But to *you* I will say that there is a conflict going on throughout the spheres, a conflict without quarter between two principles, Light—goodness and love—against Darkness—evil self-gratification at any cost. And when the evil powers discover a growth, an advance towards goodness in a human soul, they seek to frustrate it, often simply by turning it in a wrong direction—for instance, by bringing in a little self-joy; after that comes self-gratification, then desire of evil for evil's sake—often without the person himself being aware of it before it is too late."

Dahl stared at her, speechless. There she sat, calm and clear, in broad daylight, repeating almost word for word what the "Evil One" had said on that night of agitation. Had it been no hallucination? She sat there in calm strength. Her eyes rested on him, firm and penetrating. Even on that night of madness he had argued with himself about what he saw. Now he felt it as an appalling truth.

"But *why?*" he exclaimed. "Why *is* it so?"

"I don't know," she said in her strangely neutral voice. "I only know what I see—that so it *is*. I can't give an answer to any of your *why's*. I don't know *why* life is, only that it *is*; I don't know why there is a conflict between Light and Darkness, only that there is, and that we must each choose our side in it, and that I *have* chosen. I don't even know which power will conquer in the end.

"Well, yes, I *do* know, because I can see that evil self-gratification through destruction of others leads to final self-destruction. But you, Mr. Dahl, are not to think about these things. You are to live within your limitations. There are many people in our time who want to see and know things beyond the reach of their senses and who strive to train up other senses. It leads to no good."

"But you yourself?" said Dahl.

"I did not seek it," she replied. "It came to me. My eyes

were opened—not for my self-gratification, but so that I might be of more use to the powers I serve. So that I may teach those I meet the laws of a natural growth of—of what in each individual is the inmost, the divine part of his being.

“You look at me. I know what you want. You want eternal life. Yes, but eternal life is not a life measured by days and years. Eternal life is a state of the human soul. It contains no *desire* of continuation of life. It has eternity itself within it, and eternity takes no count of days and years.

“Well, there *is* a life after death. But that life after death is no more eternity than this life on earth. *The Eternal himself* is eternal life. Without him, everything in heaven and earth is transitory. Because his life is in us, we are alive. The practical knowledge of this, the *experience* of this, is eternal life. He who attains to this is in eternity and does not trouble himself about death, or what comes after it.

“But to you, Mr. Dahl, I have this to say—you must not go looking for angels and spheres which are beyond the reach of your senses. Be wide-awake with the senses you have, see, hear, feel. The eternity for which you yearn is as near to you in this world as in any other. It dwells within yourself, and you can attain to it in the performance of useful everyday work. Never try to get ‘communications’ from another sphere. You are always liable to deceptions. Avoid all spiritualism and occultism. Even if you think you are gaining insight for a while, you may land, before you know it, in total madness. I could tell you a good deal about these things, because I see them, but I don’t want your thoughts to be there. I will go so far as to say that if an angel came down from heaven with a revelation for you, you must not abandon your own judgment—I don’t know what you call it in Danish, we say common sense. In out time a great many people flock to spiritualism and occultism like moths around a lamp, believing that there they have the light itself. It is truly ‘occult.’ It is a black eclipse.

“True wisdom arises from the eternal life of the human soul. That wisdom and your common sense should be your guide—and goal. For there is eternal growth in it.”

She ceased speaking and turned towards the door, as though expecting someone. Mai followed her glance and looked at her in surprise.

Dahl’s thoughts drifted back to the time when he moved in “the

open" with Lillebror. Suddenly he heard Mrs. Skaarup's voice. She had brought her husband in and was introducing him to Miss Dale.

Skaarup, who was always full of instructive talk, began to propound his opinions about the Swedes and their capital.

Dahl rose and said good-bye.

Now he understood Barnes; he himself felt impelled to talk to him about Miss Dahl. But he would first go home and collect his impressions.

Not until he was sitting on his sofa and heard Miss Bang strike a chord on the piano in the next room, did it occur to him that once more he had been robbed of a chance of speaking to Mai.

XLVIII. In the Deer Park

THERE had been a meeting of the Theosophical Lodge. Skaarup had got Miss Dale to take part in the meeting and, as it had leaked out that she was a clairvoyante, the members had turned up in full strength. Their expectation of hearing news from the spirit-world was, however, disappointed. She avoided all questions that concerned the transcendental and confined herself exclusively to the human character and its possibilities of development in the course of daily work.

She had nevertheless made a powerful impression, doubtless more by her personal authority than by the ideas she expressed.

Dahl and Mai Skaarup were standing in a group with the Councillor, Kjellström, Sophus Peterson and "the seraph."

"She's all right," said the Councillor, referring to Miss Dale.

"She is pretty highly developed anyhow," Sophus Peterson admitted. "I believe, however, it's due to her having led a chaste life, for she has neither read nor studied."

"Be sure she knows how to dive into the depths of her own being," declared Kjellström.

"They say she's a clairvoyante," muttered the Councillor reflectively; "but if that's so, it hasn't done any harm to her common sense."

"Did you hear her voice?" asked the seraph.

"I couldn't very well help it, though I am a bit deaf," said the Councillor.

The seraph's eyes showed no offence, as they absently glanced at the Councillor.

"Her voice is absolutely *direct*," he continued; "it is the perfectly pure expression of her being. Other people's voices pass through their self-conception and are coloured by it; what you hear is more a fond view of their excellent ego than that ego itself. With her the voice comes direct. It is the tone of the soul."

Miss Dale, who had been talking to Skaarup, glanced suddenly

at the seraph and stopped. She thought for a moment and then went over to him.

"I have something to say to you," she said.

The seraph bowed graciously and was all ears.

"No, you're to listen to my *words*," she said; "you are not to listen for music. What I have to say to you is a warning. You must be constantly on your guard against impetuosity; take care it doesn't get the upper hand with you."

Barnes, who had just left Katharina Sonne to speak to Dahl, started and examined Miss Dale attentively.

The seraph looked surprised. "I—I'm not in the habit of being impetuous," he said mildly.

"No," she answered, "but I have been watching you during the meeting, and I know that you are prone to sudden impulses. You have accustomed yourself to be open to inspirations. But not all inspirations are good. It is dangerous to leave your doors open in every kind of weather. One ought to be able to shut one's door when one chooses."

The seraph bowed politely, but evidently without understanding.

Miss Dale would have said more, but Skaarup came and claimed her attention.

"Now what the devil was that?" said Barnes in an undertone to Dahl. "It was uncanny."

Dahl laughed. "I can't see anything in it but an ordinary piece of good advice—which in this case seems to be superfluous."

"Of course," said Barnes; "of course. I suppose I'm the only one who is hysterical about my friend the seraph—as I told you once before. When she spoke to him it came over me again. I should so much like to take him away to some out-of-the-way corner and see that no harm came to him.—But now you must do me a favour. Katharina Sonne has just asked if I wouldn't go for a walk in the Deer Park. Now make her happy just this once by granting the wish that she couldn't say out but that was implied in her suggestion to me—come with us."

"Ye—es," said Dahl, hesitating, "but—do you mind if I ask Miss Skaarup if she will come too?"

"Mai Skaarup?" said Barnes, scanning Dahl for a brief moment. "I don't quite know—oh, yes, it's just as well. You ask her, and I'll tell Katharina that you will come, at any rate."

He went across to Katharina.

"I've asked Dahl whether he and Miss Skaarup will come with

us," he said. "He'll come, at all events, and I got him to ask Miss Skaarup, so we shall hear whether she's coming."

"Is that her he's talking to now?" asked Katharina.

"Yes."

"She's pretty."

"Yes," said Barnes, "she's very beautiful—and very good."

"Do you know her well?"

"No, I've only met her a few times."

"But still you know that she's good?"

"Oh, well," replied Barnes, "I only know it because there's nothing else she could be."

Katharina attempted a smile. "Are you in love?"

"Not yet," said Barnes.

"But on the way to it?"

"Not that either."

Dahl came towards them, bringing Mai. Katharina gave him her hand. "It's a long time," she said.

"Yes," he answered, "it——" He looked at her pale, thin face and could say no more. Barnes introduced Mai Skaarup.

"There's a train in a few minutes," he said. "We can just catch it if we go now."

Dahl and Katharina walked a little in front of the others.

"You don't ride any more either," she said.

"No," he answered. "I haven't time. I must work hard. I've been neglecting the University all this year."

"And is your reading to blame for your never coming to see us now?" she asked. "Or have we—have I said or done anything to offend you?"

Her voice sounded hushed. There was something simple and touching in its note which he had never noticed in her before. He found it impossible to answer a word.

"If I have," she continued, "won't you tell me what it is?"

She raised her eyes to him in a despondent appeal; they looked as if her life depended on what he would say. The profound dejection of self-condemnation weighed upon him.

"You?" he said at last. "You have done nothing to me but good. But—but I'm—you don't know what a miserable creature I feel in your presence—I'm not worth your wasting a thought on me."

A look of joy lighted up her face. Something of her old energy

and gameness came back. She asked, cautiously but yet earnestly: "Won't you tell me what it is that is tormenting you?"

He saw the generous impulse of her heart and could not deal it a blow.

"Perhaps, another time," said he, "when we are alone."

He stopped, waiting for the others. This brought them near enough to release Barnes from answering Mai's question:

"Isn't Miss Sonne strong? It gave me quite a shock to see how pale and thin she is."

In the train the conversation dragged. Katharina sat still, leaning forward. Barnes, who knew her well, saw that her brain was working energetically. He guessed that when they reached the forest she would run headlong into her unhappy fate, and he thought it was better so, but was anxious about what might happen. He decided to keep near her, though by so doing he let Dahl and Mai leave the train first and get a little distance ahead.

To cover their happy want of consideration, he began to talk animatedly to Katharina, who was not listening. At last, however, she noticed that his manner became more and more unnatural. She liked him and would gladly help him if she could.

"You're sorry about something," she began; but on seeing his eyes full of a tenderness of which she was clearly the object, she broke off in alarm and said: "Let's hurry on; the others are a long way ahead."

Dahl and Mai had entered the path on which they had seen each other for the first time. Neither said anything; they knew too well each other's thoughts. Both had forgotten that Barnes and Katharina were behind them.

On reaching the great beech, they stopped simultaneously. Dahl looked up into its foliage and could still see that it was a beech before the fall. Mai looked down upon the ground, where she had seen him lying. She knew the place and smiled. He felt it and turned towards her.

The other two had walked so quickly that Barnes was quite out of breath.

"You must have forgotten that I'm not in such good training as you," he said to Katharina. "Do you mind if we take it a little easier? The others have stopped to wait."

"They haven't seen us at all," said Katharina.

"But they'll turn around," said Barnes.

Katharina clutched his arm forcibly. She was white in the face and he hastened to support her.

She tore herself free and turned away.

"Come away!" she said. "Can't you see? He's just proposing!"

She pressed her hand tightly to her breast; he saw she was again on the point of falling and hurried to her.

She laughed aloud.

"You mustn't laugh," he said.

She laughed still more convulsively, a painfully dry and soulless laugh.

"Why not?" she said. "Shan't we get engaged too?"

"Katharina," said Barnes sadly, "you don't know what you're saying."

"Yes, I do," she said. "I'm quite serious.—But perhaps you don't care either—perhaps you don't care for me?"

"Whether I care for you or not is beside the point to-day. But let me see you home.—There are the others."

When Dahl turned towards Mai under the great beech, his whole past vanished from his mind. All was so perfect that there was scarcely room for a wish; he tried to find a word which could express all he felt, looked at her, and found it.

"Mai!"

He put out his hand to her, and as she was about to give him hers, he heard Katharina's desperate laughter.

Mai saw his hand drop and the light in his face go out. It was as though the heavy black clouds which were gathering above the tree-tops had cast their shadows upon him. He bent his head and looked at the ground. She almost thought he was hiding his eyes from her.

At last he looked up at her. "We'd better join the others," he said. "They're waiting for us."

"Perhaps they're afraid of the weather," said Mai. "I think, too, it would be wise to find shelter."

Barnes turned round sharply as they came up. Katharina was still standing with her back to them.

"I'm going home," said Barnes. "I'm not very well, and I don't trust the weather. Miss Sonne thinks it's a pity I should go by myself, so she's going too."

"We were just talking about shelter," said Mai. "I propose we all go home."

"Then let's be quick," said Barnes, and went on ahead with Katharina.

The platform was packed with people and there was a long queue at the ticket-office. The train came in, filled, and started before they managed to get tickets.

"Let's go by tram," said Dahl; "they run every second."

Before they reached the tramway the storm burst, first a sharp shower of hail, then cold, drenching rain.

The tram-car was full too, but there was room in the open car at the back. As they took their seats in it, Mai Skaarup caught sight of Katharina's face.

"You're ill!" she exclaimed. "You can't stand this. Put on my cloak."

"No," said Katharina.

Mai was taken aback for an instant at her hard, almost angry tone. "But why?" she asked.

Katharina bent her head, pressed her lips together, and shut her eyes. A tear or two fell upon her dress.

Barnes quickly took the cloak from Mai and wrapped it around Katharina so as to conceal her head and face. Then he sat bending towards her, as though to prevent the wind blowing the cloak open. This made it impossible for the others to see how her body was shaken with silent weeping.

"Do you think *you* will be all right in that thin dress in this weather?" Dahl said to Mai.

"Yes," she said. "I'm strong. And besides, I'm so happy that I couldn't possibly be ill."

But the rain lashed and the cold stung through the thin white dress, the same she had had on the first time he saw her. She sat cringing, and the colder it grew, the hotter he was with fear; he thought the tram stopped hours at every halt.

On reaching town, Katharina and Barnes got off. Katharina handed the cloak to Mai. "Thanks," she said.

"Won't you keep it?" asked Mai.

"No, thanks."

Barnes pulled her over to another car.

Mai wrapped the cloak about her.

"It's not much use now," said Dahl.

"N—no," said Mai; "It *was* pretty cold. But I think I'm beginning to get warm inside."

Down by the Citadel they got off.

"It's a good thing I haven't far to go," she said. "I'm so awfully tired I can hardly drag my feet along."

He took her arm; she smiled as he did so, but he was too much afraid to be really glad. He could feel a cold shudder go through her every instant.

When they reached the Skaarups' door she said: "I should have liked so much to spend the afternoon with you, but—but I believe I ought to go to bed."

"Why, you're not ill?" he said in alarm.

"No, no, but I think I ought to try and get warmed right through. You'll come soon, won't you?—To-morrow, perhaps?"

She smiled. But her eyes were misty and somehow not quite her own.

XLIX. The Angels

NEXT day Dahl called at the Skaarups'. Skaarup himself was at the office, said his wife. "My husband won't be home for a couple of hours."

"I hope Miss Mai is none the worse for the wetting yesterday," said Dahl.

"We—ell, it didn't do her any good," said Mrs. Skaarup. "She caught a bad cold; she's in bed with influenza.—Oh, it can't be anything serious," she added, smiling at the alarm in Dahl's face. "She's young and strong. In fact, I believe she's sleeping it off at this moment."

The day after, Dahl called again. Mai was not yet up.

"She sleeps and sleeps," said Mrs. Skaarup. "But every time she wakes, she looks so pleased and happy. 'I'm having a lovely time,' she says. 'I just feel so faint that I can do nothing but sleep, and sleeping is as lovely as being in heaven. Sometimes I really think I am there.'—I believe she can almost feel that nature is making her well while she is asleep."

"Does Miss Dale know she's ill?" asked Dahl.

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. Skaarup. "Miss Dale is here all day. As soon as Mai wakes she goes in and sits with her, and Mai is so happy; she *loves* Miss Dale.—By the by, Mr. Barnes is here just now; he's in my husband's study, talking to Miss Dale. Since Mai has been ill he has come every day, because, you see, Miss Dale spends the whole day here now. Well, they're in the study, if you'd like to speak to them."

"No, thanks," said Dahl; "I won't disturb them. I'd rather come another time—when Miss Dale's alone."

He managed to let two days go by before calling again at the Skaarups'. Mrs. Skaarup seemed less at her ease than before.

"It's not going so well as I hoped. We've had to send for the doctor. Her temperature is high; but then she's young and strong, he says. She's awake at the moment. Miss Dale is with her and they want to be alone, so I'm in here and I'm very worried. Miss Dale is leaving soon, she says. But I hope she'll

stay till Mai is well again. I don't think Mai can do without her at all, while she's in this weak state."

Dahl went away feeling uneasy.—Miss Dale was leaving soon. "I shall stay here awhile for your sake and for the sake of another," she had said to Barnes. The other was, of course, Mai. And to Mai she had said that she would stay perhaps as long as Mai wanted her!—Barnes came every day to see Miss Dale. What did they talk about? Barnes must know something.

He went to the college and knocked at the door of Barnes's room.

"He's not at home," said the student who had the rooms opposite.

"Do you know when he'll be back?" asked Dahl.

"No, he's gone away."

"Gone away? Where to?"

"I don't know. Perhaps you can find out from the dean; I know he had a talk with him before he went."

Dahl went to the dean of the college. All he could find out was that Barnes had gone home to the parsonage.

"Are you an intimate friend of Barnes?" the dean asked. "If so, perhaps you can tell me what he has in his mind. His scholarship still has a year to run. But yesterday he informed me that he thought of giving it up; he was going home to speak to his father about it. But in any case I might consider his rooms vacant, he said. I asked him whether he had come into money, but he hadn't. He gave me rather a high-strung impression and I felt sorry about it; he's a painstaking and conscientious student. Do you know anything about his motives?"

No, Dahl knew nothing.

So Barnes had gone home to the parsonage.

Now he would *have* to speak to Miss Dale.

But suddenly his courage failed him.

He walked about the streets all the afternoon to calm his feelings. Towards evening he directed his steps to Miss Dale's hotel.

But perhaps she was still with Mai. So he went there.

No, Miss Dale was at her hotel. It was the maid who told him.

"How is Miss Mai?" he asked.

She shook her head and dried her eyes.

"The doctor's just gone," she said, "and he looked very serious."

Dahl hurried to the hotel.

Miss Dale was in her room. Her face had a tense look of concentration; she gave him no greeting when he entered.

"Am I disturbing?" he asked.

"Well—yes," she answered, moving her hand as though to take up the telephone. She dropped her hand again and said quickly: "You can stay all the same—but you must sit still and not say anything."

Her expression was still tensely observant, but he could not tell what she was listening and watching for.

All at once she said: "Now Mai is waking up. She's asking for me. Be silent. Don't move. Sit quite still. There'll be a telephone call in a moment."

She laid her hand on the receiver and listened.

Dahl could hear her breathing and the beating of his own heart.

The telephone rang. Miss Dale had the receiver at her ear before the bell stopped. "Yes, it's me.—Yes. Tell Mai I'm coming right now.—Get a taxi," she said to Dahl.

He ran downstairs. There was a stand just in front of the hotel. When the taxi came up she was already in the street. "Yes—you can come too if you like," she said, after a brief glance at him.

It was not far to the Skaarups'. Neither said anything on the way.

The maid opened the door. She was crying.

"They think she's dying," she said.

Miss Dale made no answer but walked rapidly through the long passage. Outside the door she stopped for an instant. They could hear Mai's voice. Dahl saw Miss Dale's face close and stiffen into an austere, inhuman strength. She stood motionless and seemed to be absorbing force from something he could not see.

Then she opened the door, and as she did so her face showed the usual smile with which she always greeted Mai.

Mai was just awake from a lovely sleep. When she saw her parents with tears in their eyes, she knew they thought she was going to die. Then she saw death with their eyes and felt towards it as they did; she was afraid and began to cry.

When the door opened, she turned her face to Miss Dale.

"They think I'm going to die," she said. "Is it true? I want so much to live. I have only just began to be really alive. Do you think I shall die?"

Miss Dale sat on the edge of her bed and took her hand.

"Yes, Mai," she said quietly. "It is true. You are going home now. Don't cry. You have already been home, while you were asleep. You have only come here now to say good-bye. Haven't you been dreaming about the angels?"

"Yes," said Mai; "wait a minute—no—yes, it is really you. You *know* it. You see the angels. Don't you?"

"Yes," said Miss Dale, "I see them. In a little while *you* will see them too. Be sure someone is coming for you."

"Will you stay with me till then?" asked Mai.

"I shall stay with you till they come," said Miss Dale.

Mai looked up into her face and smiled.

"Thanks," she said, and closed her eyes. The smile stayed on her lips.

Mrs. Skaarup bent over her.

"Do you feel happy?"

"Lovely," whispered Mai. "Just as I do when I'm asleep."

A little while after, she looked up at Miss Dale.

"Will they let me die now?"

Miss Dale smiled: "You must wait a little while yet."

"Why?" Mai begged. There was a sweet impatience in her smile.

Miss Dale gave a subdued laugh: "Because your dress is not quite ready yet."

It seemed to Dahl that Mai laughed too. Her laugh could not be heard, but he could see she was laughing.

"A dress made of that stuff you were talking about once," she said. "Will the angels bring it? Then at last I shall be able to see it."

She closed her eyes and lay still with her hand in Miss Dale's. A deep silence fell upon the room, so still that they all unconsciously muffled their breath.

All at once something happened which made the stillness deeper than they could bear.

Miss Dale's eyes were fixed above Mai's pillow. Dahl saw her bow her head with a gentle nod and heard her say in a low voice: "Yes."

She bent over Mai and said: "Now, Mai, your dress is ready. Say good-bye. They have come to fetch you."

Mai turned her head to her parents. They knelt down and kissed her right hand. Her left still lay safe and quietly in Miss Dale's.

Dahl stood at the foot of the bed. As Mai's eyes moved back from her parents to Miss Dale, they glanced across him. A bright smile broke out on her face, as though she would say something kind to him; but at that moment her head sank back on the pillow and the smile grew stiff.

Miss Dale let go her hand. Without looking at the others, she made a gesture that they were to go.

They went outside and waited—how long none of them knew.

When Miss Dale came out she stood for a moment and looked at them. There was a calm purity about her, as though she did not belong to this world. If she had told them that Mai had risen from the dead, they would have believed her. But she said:

"Now those who wish may go and see the body that Mai used. But no one may weep because she does not need it any more."

Dahl had had no desire to weep. He had scarcely felt his own existence. His whole soul had been with Mai. He had come so near to self-oblivion that he shared in her last moments without feeling that he was one of those from whom she was parting. Even when her smile grew stiff, it only seemed to mean that she would smile at him eternally. Only when he went out in obedience to Miss Dale did he feel the parting, but he did not yet understand that Mai was dead.

When Miss Dale returned he knew it. And when he came out into the street, the world withered.

L. To America

THE steamer made fast to the quay in the little market town. Barnes went ashore and nodded in passing to one of his old masters, whose outline had become monstrous through beer. When he had first come to the school he had been as young and slight as a lieutenant.

Barnes climbed the hilly street and crossed the square, stopping for a moment outside a watchmaker's. It was there he had once stopped Helen Strömstad and told her she ought to be careful of the people she was associating with. A few steps farther on it was that he had received sail-maker Berg's quid of tobacco in his ear.

Berg was no longer standing there. No doubt he was dead. And Helen's mother was dead. Who could be living in her house?

He looked in at the window as he passed, but there was no face behind the panes.

Helen was sitting in the garden. She had moved into her old home after her meeting with the Professor on the bluff. She saw nobody. Alone she went every day to the office, as pure in mind as when she had lived at home as a young girl. Then she had been unconsciously pure, but now she was so from deliberate choice. People who came into the office were apt to drop their eyes in speaking to her; for this deliberate choice gave her eyes a strength and depth which the good people of the town and country-side were not able to face for long at a time.

Barnes went on along the country road. He had much to think about. He had to tell his father that he wanted to give up his studies and go to America with Miss Dale, and he had to give valid reasons for doing so. This last would not be easy. What reasons could he give which the old clergyman would understand? It seemed more difficult here in these familiar scenes than when he was talking to Miss Dale in Copenhagen. If she was not in Copenhagen—that is to say, if Mai Skaarup was dead—when he returned, he was to take the next boat to America; she would

join the boat in Christiania. It was all arranged, but he did not look forward to telling his father.

He was tired of rehearsing his explanation and began to look about him. Everything was as before.

No; the Professor's house had become a wooden-shoe shop. Was the Professor dead, or had he gone away again?

He could ask the shoemaker. He couldn't see him properly, because Per Madsen was standing in the way. Per stood on one leg, while the shoemaker measured the other shoe. Now he could see him.

What in the name of all the devils——?! The wooden-shoe maker was the Professor himself. He was engaged in cutting notches in a stick after measuring Per Madsen's evil-smelling wooden shoe.

He walked on, wondering whether the Professor was stricken with madness or poverty.

Next day he had a long talk with his father. Pastor Barnes had a depressed look as they left the study.

"No," he said, "I can't say I *understand* you. You say there's a 'school for the development of character' at Los Angeles, and you want to go there and study. That I can understand, but what I can't see is why it shouldn't wait until you have taken your degree. I have a feeling that you are hiding from me your most cogent reason—no, no, I have no wish to be intrusive. I know that if you could tell me, you would do so. I can yield to your reason without learning it. I shall make over to you the money your mother left you. I have confidence in you. I have never seen you allow a whim or a wild impulse to upset your rational plans. If, therefore, you appear to be doing so in this instance, I shall assume that it is I myself who have grown too old to be able to keep pace with you and understand you. I feel that your determination to leave the country is firm and well considered. You, and not I, are the one who must determine your life. And I see that in this you have no hesitation."

"I have one," said Christian. "You will be very lonely, Father."

"Loneliness is the companion of old age," said Pastor Barnes, "and to me it is the lesson of life. I am beginning to learn it. My loneliness is not to weigh upon you."

It did so nevertheless, and it would have been comforting to fly from it and leave at once.

But he would stay with the old man as long as he could. Nobody knew if they would ever see each other again. They spent the whole day together and exchanged more ideas in this short time than they had done in all their lives.

On Sunday he went to church and heard his father preach.

"There were not many in church," said Pastor Barnes as they walked home. "It is not always so empty as it was to-day—though the difference is only slight."

"But I got the impression that they are very fond of you," said Christian.

"Oh, yes," said the pastor, "I believe so too—when I'm alone with them. They are often very sincere with me."

He walked in silence for a few paces, then looked suddenly at his son, drew himself up, caught himself doing so, and said with a smile of self-irony:

"I'm not in the habit of giving myself airs, but it seems that with you I shall never overcome the wish to show off. Do you know that once my church was generally overcrowded?"

"I have a sort of recollection that they used to come from a long way off to hear you," said Christian. "In my memories of childhood you are always the centre of a large, attentive and admiring congregation."

"It is strange that I should be glad at your remembering that," said Pastor Barnes, "because it was a fraud. It was talent and nothing else. I have renounced it—but in a self-contradictory way I am glad that you should know I had talent."

The conversation seemed to be taking a turn which they usually avoided, and Christian looked about for a change of subject. He pointed to the garden. "How well it is kept!" he said.

Pastor Barnes smiled. "The credit is not due to me, but to Holger Enke. You know, he has been released from prison. The farmers here wouldn't give him work. They can't forget little Hansine."

"So you gave him work?"

"Well, it was really the Professor; he got me to do it."

"What's the matter with the Professor?" asked Christian. "He's selling wooden shoes now."

Pastor Barnes laughed. "Yes, it's one of his happy thoughts. He takes the measurements and sells the shoes, but it's Holger who makes them. People soon found this out and made a fuss,

a great deal of fuss, saying they wouldn't touch anything Holger Enke had made."

"What did the Professor say to that?"

"Well—he gave one of them, a farmer's man, a thrashing, by all reports an extremely—emphatic one, and asked 'what the hell the dirty swine meant by it'—I quote him literally; the Professor's language adapts itself rather freely to the inspiration of the moment—and he persuaded the others that if they could buy toys made by convicts they didn't know, they could also buy wooden shoes made by one they did know. In any case, they deal regularly with the Professor. Whether it is the thrashing, the argument or the prospect of a good story that has influenced them, I don't know." . . .

A week later Christian Barnes said good-bye to his father and walked into the little town. It was strange how little hold his native place had on him. There was nothing he regretted leaving. Well, his father of course, but that was out of regard for the lonely old man. He himself had nothing to tie him, either here or in Copenhagen.

He went out of his way to pass the grammar-school, looked across the playground, and listened to the noise. There was nothing here he cared to remember.

He walked on, relieved. There was the garden. He stopped at the gate, where little Helen Strömstad used to wait for him on Thursdays in their playtime. He had forgotten to ask who lived there now. He looked over the gate, to see if by chance some other little girl with soulful eyes was playing in there. The garden was as quiet as a churchyard. He stood there a long time.

"So that was it," he thought, as he walked on. "A Thursday playtime, a garden-gate, a little girl still in the lower school, a chat about nothing—that is what I take with me and should be sorry to lose. That is really all—and yet I don't feel poor!"

The day before he sailed, he went to say good-bye to Dahl.

Old Martha opened the door to him.

"Is it you, Mr. Byarnes?" she said mournfully. "You've come to see Mr. Daahl? He isn't here any more!"

"He isn't here?"

"No," said the old woman, putting the corner of her apron to her eyes. "He isn't here.—Won't you come in? Here you can

see—here's his empty room. Won't you sit down a bit? I'll have to sit down myself. I'm old and tired."

"Where is he?" asked Barnes.

"I don't know," said old Martha. The tears ran down the furrows in her cheeks. "He came in here one day and said he was moving. I couldn't believe I'd heard right, and so I asked him. He didn't answer a word, just went on packing. And then I could *see* it. I made so much of him. 'Where are you going to move to, Mr. Daahl?' I said. He didn't answer a word, just went on packing. So then I said again: 'When Mr. Byarnes comes, or when there's a letter for you, what address shall I say?' Then he answered me——"

A short, awkward sobbing checked her speech for a moment, but she quickly pulled herself together and went on: "Then he answered me: 'I have no address.' You should have seen how he looked, Mr. Byarnes! Just as if he was dead already. I was so frightened that I shook all over. 'You're *not* thinking of death, Mr. Daahl?' said I. 'Not by my own hand,' he said. 'Will you promise me that?' said I. 'I promise you that,' said he. 'I'm only going to move somewhere or other,' said he. And then he came and put his arms around my neck, just as if he'd been my own son, and said: 'Thank you for being so good to me.'—Ah, well, I did what I could for him, because I couldn't help it. I only hope he'll find one that'll look after him well.

"Don't you know what was the trouble with him, Mr. Byarnes? There was somebody he was fond of. It *can't* be that she wouldn't have him?"

"She died," said Barnes.

"Oh, dear," said the old woman quietly. "Poor young thing! Here am I, an old body; if I could have bought her life for him with my own, I might have been some use after all."

Barnes got up. She saw him out.

"If you meet him some day, Mr. Byarnes," she said, "won't you thank him for what he said to me before he went?"

"Yes," said Barnes, "if I see him."

She stood there, lonely and old, in the door of the empty room. He hadn't it in his heart to say what little likelihood there was of his meeting Dahl.

Next day he went on board the boat.

Book III

LI. Peace and Happiness

AN event of profound importance had taken place at Per Madsen's cottage, now owned by Hans Olsen and Ellen Nielsen. They had got a daughter, a "little Ellen," as Hans Olsen said; but big Ellen answered: "No, Hans; you know she's to be called Hansine."

"I forgot," said Hans; "but then we'll have to say Ellen Hansine Olsen."

They had just been watching her fall asleep and were now going for their usual evening round through the stable and over the fields.

The horse whinnied as soon as they came in; Hans gave him a little oats and chaff and patted his shining brown flank before they passed into the cowshed.

There was a smell of new-cut clover among the cows.

Hans Olsen chuckled.

"What is it?" asked Ellen.

"I can't get over my surprise that we're the owners of three cows and a whole horse," he said; "and yet here I am coolly figuring out how soon we can get four more cows and two horses."

"So you seriously think we'll manage to buy Niels Jørgensen's place too?" said Ellen. "Then we shall actually be farmers."

"Ye—es," said Hans; "little Ellen in there will wake up one day to find herself a farmer's daughter. Ah, but it's a fine thing to have somebody to work for."

They went out into the fields. The crops looked fine, just as they should be.

"It's jolly the way we work in partnership," said Hans. "First we do our share, and then comes Nature—the air and the sun and the rain—and does the rest. I could never fancy myself working at anything but the land. Look at the peace there is over it all. Shall we sit down here under the thorn-bush? There goes the sunset-bell. Old Kristen must be finding it a hard climb

to get up the tower now. 'But I'll stick to it,' he says, 'till the day they come to bury me.'

"How is it, I wonder, that you always hear voices, like, in the air all about, towards evening when it's quiet? When I was little it used to make me quite frightened, if I was alone, to hear all these voices sort of whispering to me whichever way I turned. Listen."

They sat for a good while listening. Suddenly Hans said: "Do you believe there is a God?"

Ellen looked at him in surprise. "We've always been taught so," she said.

"Oh, yes," said Hans, "I know, we've been taught we've got to believe in God. But that isn't what I meant. I meant, do you believe in yourself that there is a God? I don't mean what we were taught about the Trinity and the Virgin Mary and Martin Luther and all that, or what the Catholics believe in and such-like, but do you believe in yourself, without thinking of what we were taught at school or what we are told in church, that there is a God?"

"I think I know what you mean," said Ellen. "And I think I should have believed in a God, even if I'd never heard about him. I don't believe I could have helped it. It comes over me of its own accord."

"How's that?" asked Hans.

Ellen thought to herself awhile, with her eyes on a lady-bird that was crawling over her apron.

"It's sometimes when I'm sitting by myself and not thinking a bit about any of the things I've got to do—then I come to feel so strange and *good*."

"Well, I know you're that," said Hans.

"No, that's not it," said Ellen. "There's different ways of being good—I expect I'm good the same way as other people. But at times something good seems to come down into me, something much better than I am, so good that there's hardly room for it in me, and it makes me think I can never come to any harm, however much things go against me. And this must come from God, and that's what makes me believe there is a God."

Hans sank into deep thought. . . .

Ellen rose to her feet. "We'd better go home and see if the little one is still asleep."

"Yes," said Hans. "Who's that walking along the road there?"

Why, it's Peter Murer and Tine! They're a fine-looking pair."

"Yes," said Ellen; "and they've got two children, and they're still going about like an engaged couple." . . .

Ellen did not know what truth there was in her words. Tine and Peter had just left the Professor.

For the first six months after the separation their home was a gloomy place, full of silent broodings. In gratitude for the settlement she had arrived at, Tine dutifully combated all regretful visions. When Dahl's image arose in her fancy, she went to her children, who were always ready to claim her attention and were still able to recall her entirely to the present. By degrees Dahl vanished altogether into the realm of unreality. She closed the door to all her dreams. But in doing so she shut out the half of her nature. Life no longer had a future, and she already prepared herself for old age. She began to look back upon life. Under the same roof with her was the man she had been married to, and, now that she was done with her own conflict, she had time to think a little of his, and room for a deep gratitude for his having set her free.

He minded his own business, seldom spoke to her, but always politely when he did so; in every way he behaved irreproachably like a stranger lodging in the house. But she could see that as time went on he became more and more of a stranger in his ways. Now and then she fell into a reverie, and, on awaking, discovered that she had been wondering what Peter could be thinking about all the time.

He had set about a thorough survey of himself, from roof to basement, and, as was so often the case in his trade, he had come to the conclusion that the material was good enough, but that it was out of repair. He went through his relations with Tine from the days of their engagement and found the first clear signs of decay—unnoticed at the time. Now and then he took his eyes off his own nature and turned them upon his neighbours. And then he smiled with melancholy sympathy. He felt at the same time nearer to them and farther from them. Without suspecting it, he was acquiring such ornaments as culture and refinement. Still less did it occur to him that this could be remarked in his conduct.

When Tine looked at him, she felt she was looking into an unknown world, which was greater than her own, and it aroused a longing in her. But it appeared to have no room for her. In

this new world Peter had forgotten that they had ever been married. That it had actually grown out of the ruin of his marriage did not occur to her. Least of all, that his view of his former boorishness had become so intensified that he could not imagine her seeing his better qualities any more than he saw them himself. He was bashful in her presence, dropped his eyes on meeting hers; so that he did not see the longing look in them, which, on meeting no response, returned to her and grew. Therefore he was reduced to speechlessness when at last she could keep silence no longer, but asked him almost despairingly: "Don't you care the least bit for me any more, Peter?"

As he could find no words to answer her at once, she asked again: "Would you rather be divorced altogether when the time of separation is up?"

The same afternoon they went to see the Professor and said they had agreed to cancel the separation.

The Professor went to his desk, moved something that chinked from the top of the document, took out the latter, and burned it.

"So that separation's done with," he said.

Then he went back to his desk and took out what had been lying above the document.

"I want you to let me give you a wedding present," he said. "But as I don't know what you would like, I'll ask you to buy something yourselves."

He handed the money to Peter.

"But there's no sense in——" Peter began.

"If I ask you," interrupted the Professor, "you can't in decency refuse."

"No, of course not," said Peter, putting the money in his pocket.

The Professor was not inclined to talk, and they on their side felt a wish to get away. Peter rose.

"Well, then I thank you for all the trouble you've had and all the help you've——"

"Don't mention it," said the Professor, with an air of superiority and reserve.

"Good-bye," they repeated.

The Professor bowed.

"Do you think he didn't like our getting married again?" said Tine when they were outside.

"I don't know," said Peter. "That he wanted to get us out of the house was clear enough, but whether it was to growl at us or grin at us, I can't tell."

There was nothing to laugh at in them, Tine thought. But Peter relapsed into silence. He went on so long without saying anything that she was again attacked by a jealous fear of his brooding. At last she said: "You're not regretting that he burned the document, are you?"

"No," said Peter, with satisfactory emphasis. "On the other hand," he added thoughtfully, "I'd like to have had another look at it before it was burnt."

"Why?"

"It occurs to me," said Peter, "that he once said something about its having to be kept at the lawyer's. So that was a lie, to put it bluntly."

"The main thing is that it's burnt," was Tine's opinion.

"And the money he gave us for a wedding present," Peter went on; "I couldn't very well count it there and then, but it seems to me that it's about the same amount we paid for the document. Wait a bit, I've got it loose in my pocket."

He took it out and counted it.

"Yes, just look here!" he exclaimed, showing her a two-crown piece with a hole in it. "It's my own money! It's what I paid for the separation. The whole thing was a fraud! And that document he was in such a hurry to burn—I'll swear he wrote it himself. Mark my words, we've never been separated at all."

They looked at each other and both burst out laughing.

Peter's laughter was of short duration. He suddenly remembered he was a man and squared his shoulders.

"It's coming it rather strong, all the same, to make fools of people like that," he said. "When I think of the day I went to repair his hen-house——"

He turned and looked in the direction of the Professor's house. "I should just like to call his attention to one or two things——"

"Have we really not been separated at all, do you mean?" asked Tine.

"Not a bit," said Peter indignantly; "I'm positive of that."

"Well, but look here, Peter, I think that's just the lovely part of it, if we were really married all the time. Both for us and the children, Peter. Then there's nothing to hide." Her deep eyes,

with their long dark lashes, beamed at him with a joy that decided it all. Before he knew it, he felt the same joy within himself and chuckled with laughter.

"I almost think," he said, "that while we're laughing here, that rascal's sitting at home and joining in. And it's us two we're all three laughing at."

"Yes, but if we join in the laugh," said Tine, "it doesn't matter so much."

"Oh, yes, it does," said Peter; "it matters a great deal, Tine; and whether we've been separated or not, we're going to have another wedding party. And we'll invite the parson, who had to lecture us—I wonder if *that* was play-acting, or did the Professor make a fool of him too?—we'll invite both the parson and the Professor. For, after all, I want to say 'Thank you' to both of them—in jest as well as in earnest."

"Do you think they'll come?" said Tine.

"The parson and I are good friends," said Peter in a self-evident way which made Tine's heart swell with pride; "and the Professor—well, he'll come right enough, if only to look at his 'wedding present.'"

"There's Hans Olsen and Ellen going home. Ah, they're happy together, those two."

"But no happier than we are," said Tine.

"There's nobody as happy as we're going to be," said Peter, putting his arm through hers.

Next Sunday was the wedding party. Half-way through the meal Peter proposed the health of the parson and the Professor. Tine listened to his speech and thought with pride that, apart from the country accent, neither of the two others could have spoken more truly, more seriously or more amusingly.

And how delightful it was to see the three men sitting over their coffee, chatting together like old friends.

LII. "Platonic Love"

JENS DAHL was living out in Frederiksberg Allé. He had moved in as a stranger, and a stranger he had remained to his landlady and all the other lodgers during the two years he had lived there. He was studying hard, but not at the University. In spite of the warnings of the Councillor and Miss Dale, he had entered the secret Oriental school and had turned his back for ever on normal life and its work. Twice it had been his lot to lose the one to whom he felt bound with his whole being. He had not the power to make Mai Skaarup's death serve for the strengthening of his character and thus keep her always within him. All his vitality was concentrated on the question whether a world existed in which Mai and Lillebror were still living, and on the possibility of establishing connection with them. All spiritualist experiments he resolutely swept aside. He had more faith in the old Indian methods. These he studied diligently, and the esoteric school gave him instruction in their practical performance.

He was informed that Indian mahatmas were the supreme directors of the school. It was true he had read the books Barnes had given him about the exposure of Madame Blavatsky, but when he began to trace results from the training of the school, they inspired him with confidence in the theosophical defence of the Society's foundress.

His sleep had undergone a change. The confused, illogical, disconnected dreams had vanished, and instead of them came clear, enlightening visions which revealed the meaning of passages in the sacred Indian books or the writings of the esoteric school which had seemed obscure when he studied them by day. During sleep his consciousness seemed clearer, his powers of comprehension keener, than in a waking state.

Possibly this was the result of his not being alone at night, but under the instruction of someone. In dreams he was always far away and knew it. In the same way, before awaking, he always had a sense that he was to return home.

It sometimes happened that in his dreams a person told him things that would occur "when he had come home." And, strangely enough, they did occur in the course of the day.

His attention was directed to two things in particular: to carrying on the dream to the moment of waking, so that no interval occurred; and to retaining and remembering what happened at the moment of falling asleep in the evening. For these objects he employed the Indian training-exercises with which he became acquainted through the Oriental school.

One day he received notice from the Scandinavian director of the school that Sophus Petersen had been accepted on probation, with orders to assist him in the translation of some preliminary instructions, which were drawn up in English.

Dahl set out to visit Sophus Petersen. It was something like two years since he had seen him last, at the theosophical meeting at which Miss Dale had been present. Since then he had avoided all intercourse with his fellow-men.

At Petersen's door he met Kjellström, who had come to get Petersen to look at his machine. Mrs. Emilie Petersen received them.

"No," she replied, with some hesitation, to the question whether her husband was at home; "but won't you come in a minute?" She showed them into the sitting-room. "I'll be back directly," she said; "I only have to give a message."

Dahl looked around the neat room, which had a whole history to tell of the steadily improving circumstances of the couple and of the development of their taste. Each piece of furniture had been added as they were able to afford it, and from first to last a growing sense of beauty could be traced.

"No, my husband is not at home," said Mrs. Petersen on her return. "He has moved."

They stared at her, bewildered.

"He has left home," she said.

"But what in the world——?" began Kjellström.

"With another woman," said Mrs. Emilie.

"Impossible," gasped Kjellström.

"Her husband is here at this moment," said Mrs. Emilie.

"My goodness——" said Kjellström.

"Isn't your husband coming back?" asked Dahl.

Mrs. Emilie opened the door of Petersen's little room and pointed.

“He’s taken his sofa and his bookshelf with him.”

Dahl looked in. Yes, the chastity sofa and the books were gone. That was all Sophus Petersen had taken from the conjugal abode.

“You were saying, Mrs. Pettersen,” began Kjellström, lapsing entirely into Swedish, “that this woman’s husband was here, and that your good man——”

“Mr. Lund has come to inquire about his wife,” said Mrs. Emilie.

“Indeed?” said Kjellström, and Mrs. Emilie went out. Kjellström turned to Dahl.

“How much of this do you understand?”

“Not a word,” said Dahl.

Mrs. Petersen came back with a well-dressed man, who seemed to be well on in the forties. His smart little moustache and his rather thin hair were carefully curled.

“This is Mr. Lund,” said Mrs. Emilie, “and these two gentlemen are friends of my husband.”

“But I don’t understand,” said Kjellström. “I thought Brother Pettersen was an ascetic——”

“Ascetic,” said Lund, “when he runs off with my wife!”

“They insist that it’s Platonic,” said Mrs. Emilie.

“Now I begin to understand——” said Kjellström.

“Platonic—*my wife!*” said Lund.

“Won’t Mrs. Pettersen be so kind as to explain?” said Kjellström.

“It began with Mrs. Lund joining the Theosophical Society, and then she came to my husband and asked if he wouldn’t explain theosophy to her.”

“What the devil did she want with that rubbish!” said Lund under his breath.

“My husband’s a good-looking man,” said Mrs. Emilie tersely.

Lund hastily twisted his curly moustache.

“And so Brother Pettersen began to expound the divine wisdom?” asked Kjellström.

Mrs. Emilie nodded. “And then it wasn’t very long before they discovered they understood one another so well that they must have seen one another in a previous incarnation.”

“*What* had they seen each other in?” asked Lund.

“They believe they have lived on earth before,” said Mrs. Emilie.

“They’re mad, in other words,” said Lund.

"One must not speak scornfully of what one does not understand," said Kjellström.

"Of course it's damned nonsense," said Lund.

"At any rate, the previous incarnation seems to have had more power over your wife than the present one," retorted Kjellström.

Lund hastily twisted his curly moustache.

"Where is your husband living?" asked Dahl.

"21 Fiolstræde," said Mrs. Emilie.

"And your wife?" asked Kjellström.

"At her sister's in Godthaabsvej," said Lund.

"Not together, after all," said Kjellström.

"Good Lord! that would be a bit too much," said Lund.

"Then perhaps it is platonic after all," said Kjellström.

Lund grunted contemptuously.

"You don't know Brother Pettersen," said Kjellström in Swedish.

"I jolly well know my wife," replied Lund in Danish.

"Might it not be supposed that she is actually stirred by religious feelings?" asked Dahl.

"No," said Lund bluntly.

"Well, then I don't understand——" said Dahl to himself.

"My husband's a good-looking man," said Mrs. Emilie.

"That's not it at all," said Lund viciously. "She doesn't care a damn for your husband."

"Then why does she run away with him?" asked Mrs. Emilie.

Dahl almost thought she was offended on Petersen's behalf.

"Why?" said Lund. "Because she's romantic. It's the cursed stage that's ruined her."

"Is she an actress?" asked Dahl.

"In a way," said Lund sullenly.

"Pardon—in what way?" asked Kjellström.

"In every way, damn it," said Lund. "She's play-acting in private life because they won't have her on the stage."

"I think I'll go and hear Brother Pettersen's explanation," said Kjellström. "You said 21 Fiolstræde, I think? Adieu, dear Mrs. Pettersen. Adieu, Mr. Lund, and let us hope the piece in which your wife is now appearing may treat of Platonic Love."

Dahl went out with him.

"I am worried," said Kjellström, when they were outside the door; "not for that dandy—he can go to the devil, he's only reaping what he has sown. But I'm worried about our friend

Mrs. Pettersen, who is suffering. A woman despised is a thing against nature. Such women seem to shrink up, grow smaller; they get sickly to look at and spiteful in their hearts. And I'm worried about Brother Pettersen, for if this woman is what her husband thinks she is, it'll go badly with Brother Pettersen, who is so simple-minded and naïve.”

He looked at his watch. “I shan't have time to see him to-day,” he said. “I must go back to my machine.”

“How is it getting on?” asked Dahl.

“Splendidly!” said Kjellström. “It only wants *one* wheel. Then it will go. You must come and see it some day. I can assure you it's a different thing now from what it was in the cigar-box. It's no longer at home in my flat. It has grown! First it outgrew the box, and now it has outgrown my room. But the manufacturer has let me put up a shed for it on an empty piece of ground by his works. You'll come and see the machine when it starts going, Mr. Dahl.”

He raised his hat and hurried away to his machine. . . .

Dahl found Sophus Petersen at home.

“I expected, however, that you would come,” he said. “You know, I'm accepted on probation in the Oriental school, and they told me you would help me with the instructions.”

Dahl looked about the room. The furniture consisted of a table, a chair, a wash-stand, a bookshelf and the chastity sofa.

“Yes, there's not much here,” said Petersen. “I am, however, going to be given curtains,” he added with a smile, like a boy with a precious secret that he would be glad to confide, but only after it has excited curiosity and wonder.

As Dahl did not ask, he began to approach the matter himself. “You see, I have moved away from home,” he said. They were now brothers in the esoteric school and ought to have no secrets from each other, so he would tell the whole story.

Well, the thing was that purity of morals was the first condition for becoming a disciple of the mahatmas. And now he had lived a life of chastity for a fairly long time. But that kind of thing gives rise to irritation between husband and wife.

What made things worse, however, was his finding a friend of the other sex. He and this lady took the same view of everything. They scarcely had to speak a word to understand each other completely.

But this friendship had anything but an ennobling effect upon Emilie. Her view of it was to such an extent—well, she was not even ashamed, however, to propose that they should “live together”—he and the lady, that is—“so as to put an end to it.”

After all, that was very generous of Mrs. Emilie, was Dahl's opinion.

Sophus Petersen stared at him a long time before he managed to attach any meaning to these words.

“Ah, looked at from *that* point of view,” he said at last, “ye—es, I dare say. But you must, however, consider what *kind* of a relationship we have to deal with.”

Sophus Petersen was a kindly soul, reluctant to speak ill of anyone, but his tone implied that Emilie had been pretty near committing the sin against the Holy Ghost in alluding to a spiritual, highly developed friendship in that way.

For he could say from experience that there was no more direct way to purity in thought, word and deed than through spiritual friendship with a refined womanly soul. “What one usually has to resist disappears, however, entirely of its own accord.”

But there was no necessity to explain it in words, when one had the proof. Dahl could see her for himself. He turned a photograph that stood on the table and with a careful hand pushed it across to Dahl.

With quiet expectation he watched Dahl as he examined the portrait. Anyone could see that it was, however, no ordinary woman.

Dahl was a long time studying her face, but Petersen did not mind this. For there was a great deal to take in.

“Well,” said Sophus Petersen, as Dahl put down the photograph, “what can you see in that face?”

“She appears to have a great deal of imagination,” Dahl considered.

“That is, however, just what she has,” said Petersen. “There is not one point in the possibilities of human development attainable by human thought in its present stage which she is unable to grasp.”

“Are you thinking of marrying her?” asked Dahl.

“We have left such thoughts a long way behind us,” said Sophus Petersen, serenely happy. “She knows that I desire nothing but self-development, and that I have entered the

Oriental school. When she has been long enough in the Theosophical Society to be admitted to the esoteric school, she will enter it herself.—I suppose you're coming to the funeral to-morrow?”

“What funeral?”

“Bjarnöe's.”

“The seraph! Is he dead?”

Sophus Petersen nodded. “He died of a heart attack last Wednesday. He's to be buried to-morrow at two—if you care to come.”

“I will,” said Dahl. . . .

Most of the theosophists came to the funeral. Skaarup was there too, and Dahl, seeing by his face that he wanted to speak to him, hurried away with Sophus Petersen.

During the funeral oration Petersen had been sitting by a young woman, whose face reminded Dahl of Helen Strömstad. He assumed that she must be nearly related to the seraph, for her pale, handsome face was steeped, as it were, in many days' weeping, its delicate lines were distorted by grief, weariness and want of sleep.

As soon as they had boarded a tram-car he asked whether she was the seraph's sister.

“No,” said Petersen, “that was Mrs. Spange, divorced. She was engaged to Bjarnöe; they were to have been married soon.”

“Poor thing,” said Dahl; “she seemed to be in despair.”

“Yes,” replied Petersen, “and a month or two ago she lost her little boy, so now she is quite alone. But she is a theosophist, however,” he added confidently, “so she will soon get over it.”

With theosophists, death had evidently lost its character of a pitiless sunderer of souls.

LIII. Warning Visions

THE more Dahl concentrated his energy on attempting to discover what happened at the moment he fell asleep and immediately before he awoke, the more inconstant became the barrier between his dream-life and his waking state. What he went through in dreams gradually acquired the same stamp of reality as his life by day. Moreover, he learned to distinguish between two kinds of visions: some were evidently direct experiences—whether real or imaginary—others were either symbolical or dramatic representations of events which had not yet taken place, but which very often actually happened after the lapse of a short time. His experience forced him to put faith in them.

Thus it was that, one day at the end of August, he went out to call on the Councillor.

He had dreamt the night before that he saw a funeral going by; several of his friends were in the procession. He turned to a looker-on and asked whose funeral it was.

“It’s the Councillor’s,” replied the stranger.

“But he’s not dead,” Dahl objected.

“He died on the third of September,” said the stranger.

“But we’re still in August,” said Dahl; “it’s the twenty-third or twenty-fourth.”

“The Councillor died on the third of September,” the stranger insisted.

A moment later Dahl woke up and convinced himself that it really was the twenty-fourth of August. In the afternoon he went out to learn whether the Councillor might be ill.

A maid opened the door and showed him into the little room where he had talked to the Councillor before joining the Theosophical Society.

The little old man with the broad head was sitting in the same chair at the table. He looked doubtfully at Dahl, with a kind of strain, as though there was a mist before his eyes.

“Oh, it’s you,” he said at last. “Glad to see you.—What’s

that? How am I? I'm no way at all. There's nothing wrong with me, but I'm just quietly falling to pieces. A crack here and a crack there. Look!"—he pointed to his lower lip—"I've just stuck a piece of stamp-paper over it. That's what I call my ticket for the journey." He picked up a half-smoked cigar and relit it.

"I can still taste tobacco," he said, "but I can't smoke for long at a time. Either I get tired of supplying the wind, or else I drop off and forget to puff. Well, it's a saving either way. But what about yourself? How are *you*? You've gone in for the esoteric school after all, I hear. Have you reached the astral plane now, so that you can travel gratis backwards and forwards between the world of the living and the world of the dead? Do you think you can be there to receive me on the other side one of these days?

"No, none of that!" he interrupted with annoyance, as Dahl was beginning a remark that the Councillor might live a long while yet.

He sat in silence for some time with a cross look, puffing at his cigar, then came to himself and said:

"Well, then you haven't reached your astral consciousness yet, so that you can tell me whether there *is* a life after death or not? What?"

"Don't you believe in it, sir?" asked Dahl.

"Believe?" repeated the Councillor. "Oh, yes, when I was well I believed it all right. I've been a theosophist for many years, you know. But now it often seems to me so unreasonable, when you come to think of it. Perhaps that's because I'm so tired that I can't imagine keeping on any longer. But if there's anything in it, I shall soon find out. And if there isn't—well, at any rate I shan't feel tired any more."

He looked very tired at that moment. Dahl got up. The Councillor gave him his hand.

"Good-bye, my young friend. Take care of yourself, and may you live happily. I scarcely think we shall see each other again." . . .

They did not. The Councillor died on the third of September.

LIV. His Will Be Done

WINTER had breathed its chill over the earth. Fields and ponds were held in its grip; the snow lay hard as ice.

It had been calm all day, but towards evening the wind came in gusts, sharp as a knife and cold as steel, sending men's fists up to nose and ears. At last the wind drove them indoors and had the fields and roads to itself. It rose in force and became a snow-storm; it howled about roofs and gables, shook the frozen tops of naked trees, spread a thick coat of new snow over all the fields, and raised great drifts across the road wherever there was a gap in the hedge.

The Professor looked out of his window till the snow was so thick that he could see nothing. Then he pulled on a pair of long boots, slipped into a fur coat, and went out. The country was pathless and strange, as he had never seen it before. He took it into his head to go out into the solitude and struggle with the blast.

He fought his way through the storm until he found himself on the moor in front of Holger Enke's cottage. By now it was dark and the cottage was scarcely to be distinguished from the white ground, but a red glow from the window shone upon the snow and showed the way.

Holger was sitting before the open stove, looking into the fire. His shadow stretched across the floor and up the wall to the ceiling. He had not heard anyone come in, either because of the storm or of his own deep thoughts. On hearing the Professor's "Good evening," he turned with a look of surprise, stood up, and said at last: "In this weather!—Have you walked out here in this weather?"

"Yes," said the Professor, "I shall never be too old for boys' tricks."

Holger smiled. "You don't always behave like other folk. Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks." He took off fur cap and coat and looked about for something to hang them on. Holger took them.

"Here's a nail," he said, hanging the coat on it, "and there's a chair." He pointed at the one he had just been sitting on.

The Professor looked around the room. "Where are you going to sit?" he asked.

"On the bed," said Holger.

"You might throw on a couple of logs," said the Professor as he sat down. "I like to hear the fire crackle properly when the storm's howling so confoundedly outside."

He looked critically about the room. The only chair was the one he was sitting on. Over by the window stood a carpenter's bench and a lathe. Along the farther wall stood the bed; table there was none. All was clean and tidy, but the whitewashed walls had a cold look.

"Is all your furniture in this room?" he asked.

"There's a chair in the kitchen," said Holger.

"Bless my soul," said the Professor, "you have a chair in each room!"

"I don't want any more," said Holger.

"No—you don't exactly go in for much sociability," said the Professor.

"No," said Holger. The Professor stole a glance at him. He didn't seem inclined for humour just then.

The Professor decided to change his tone. "You've been getting a good deal of work on the farms, I see," he began.

"Yes," replied Holger, "I'm pretty well off for work. It began with Hans Olsen coming over here one summer evening for a chat."

He relapsed into thought for a while, and the Professor left him alone. They both sat in silence, the Professor with the fire on one side and the lantern on the other, Holger on the edge of the bed with the lantern lighting up his face.

"So it was Hans Olsen who made a beginning," said the Professor.

"Yes, he came over here, and there was nothing to be seen in him but friendliness," said Holger; "nor in Ellen either, when I went over there to work."

"There's more independence about Hans and Ellen than one would think," said the Professor.

Holger was silent a little while.

"They let me see their little girl," he said, and was silent again.

"She's a pretty little thing, isn't she?" asked the Professor.

Holger did not answer at once, and when he spoke it was no answer but a continuation of his own train of thought.

"She wasn't afraid of me," he said. "They let me try carrying her, too," he went on. "I almost cried when I had her in my arms. I always made so much of the likes of her. She wasn't a bit afraid of me. I can't make it out."

"Why not?" asked the Professor.

"Why, they say the likes of her have a sort of—instinct—for which are the good people and which are the wicked," said Holger.

"Do you want to make out that *you* are wicked?"

Holger hesitated a little before answering.

"I've been thinking a lot these times," he said. "More than I can abide, I'm afraid. I dare say it'd do me good if I could talk to you a bit—it'd ease me like—for what I can't get over is that it's the same thoughts that keep on coming, and I don't get any further with them."

He watched the Professor's face for permission to continue, and then went on: "You see, you once put it on me that I was to bear my punishment all my life and stay here, where they all know who I am and I can read my sentence in everybody's eyes. I could understand that and I thought it was fair and just. You got me to believe that I was to do some of it for Hansine's sake. That gave me strength to take upon myself whatever might come. I was put to bearing burdens, and I did it with a will.—But folks don't judge me any more. Children don't run away at the sight of me. They stop and talk to me. They look at me as if I was a big dog, and think to themselves: 'He won't do you any harm.'"

"That must be good, I should think," said the Professor.

"Then can you explain why it doesn't make me *glad*?"

"No," said the Professor.

Holger nodded like a man who knows his proofs are sound.

"I *know* I'm not done with my punishment. *More* than that I didn't know till the other day. I'd been put to bear a burden, and I thought I knew where my burden was to be found, since the others took theirs off me. I took myself up to the churchyard, over to Hansine's grave. I haven't spoken her name before this evening. And it doesn't hurt me to speak it now. It didn't hurt me, either, to stand by her grave. There was peace over it,

over hers and her parents'.—You asked me once if I remembered Hansine's eyes and Hansine's dimples. I stood by her grave and *forced* myself to see her. There was no judgment in her eyes. However long I looked. No judgment."

The Professor looked up. "Might you not suppose that that was forgiveness?"

"Yes. Forgiveness from her. Forgiveness for what I'd done."

"Well?" said the Professor.

"There was peace over the grave," Holger went on; "but there was no peace in me."

"You had not forgiven yourself?"

"I suppose not, for what I'd done. At any rate, not for what I *didn't* do."

The Professor looked up at him, unable to understand.

"Can't you see?" said Holger. "No, I can't make it out myself either. I'll never be able to make it out in all eternity.—I might have married her, taken her away.—I can bear being wicked and knowing that I'm punished for it. But I can't put up with being wicked and not being punished for it. I can't put up with it. No, I can't put up with it."

The Professor sat staring into the fire. He could not take his eyes off it, he was half hypnotized by it. He felt as though a mighty hand had seized upon his thoughts and turned them which way it pleased. He heard Holger's voice: "I can't put up with it."

"Then die," he said calmly, and the next moment thought absently: "What am I saying to the man!"

"What's the use of dying," said Holger, "if there's a life after death?"

"The life after death may be a happy one," said the Professor.

"Not if there's memory," answered Holger.

"Happy," he repeated after a while, "happy—I've been thinking so much these days. More than I've really got brains for. Happy? Yes, if I'd never been born—*that* would have been a happy thing for my mother, for everybody, and for myself most of all. A happy life after death, you say. I've no hopes of that; it isn't for those who have a memory like mine. No, if one could just be wiped out! Not be anywhere at all! For there isn't anywhere I can endure to be."

The Professor looked up from the fire. "What text do you remember best from your school-days?" he asked.

Holger answered mechanically and without hesitation:

"'Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.'—That's a fact," he added. "There isn't a place where I can hide myself."

"From whom?" asked the Professor.

"From the Judge. From myself and the Judge."

"You believe the Judge sees everything and understands everything?"

"I should say so."

"Better than the man who is to be judged?"

"I should say so."

"And his eye is upon you everywhere?"

"Yes."

"Then you've only been moved from a smaller prison into a bigger one."

Holger looked up at the Professor. The lines of his face smoothed themselves out and his features were ready to reflect a beneficent thought which was being born in him. The Professor went on:

"You must remain always under the eye of your jailer, and by your own will. You took your earthly punishment, and took it willingly. The authorities pardoned you. You took your punishment among men and took it willingly. The eyes of men absolved you. As you bore your punishment, so must you bear your liberty. Whether people condemn or forgive, no longer concerns you. Now you are under God's eye; in what way it looks upon you, nobody can know except yourself, who feel it. Even you don't know *what* it sees in you."

"No," said Holger; "I don't know either whether he will ever set me free."

"You are not allowed to desire that. You must not *will* it."

Holger nodded. "I know that. I only *will* what I *have* to do."

He raised his head and looked the Professor firmly in the face. There was a clear serenity in his strength of will.

"His will be done," said the Professor quietly.

"His will be done!" repeated Holger firmly.

The Professor surveyed the compact force concentrated in

Holger's big face. He hesitated cautiously for a moment, but then said.

"Even if it is eternal damnation?"

Holger reeled as if he had been struck with cold steel. His big frame tottered for an instant. His face was as white as the wall. He pulled himself together.

"Even—if it is——"

He dropped as if struck by a mighty hand.

The Professor bent over him, but saw no sign of life. He tore the waistcoat open and put his hand on his heart. It was beating.

He let Holger lie a moment. Then he took both his feet, lifted them up, and held them in the air till he saw the blood return to his head. When Holger opened his eyes the Professor laid his feet on the floor again and was going to help him to the bed.

But Holger got up of his own accord. His face was strangely clear; his pupils were unnaturally large; a bottomless depth of knowledge seemed to lie behind them. He moved his head in surprise, and his eyes recovered their usual look; their depth and clearness vanished. It was as though he were putting on his face again.

"I must have fainted," he said. "It was that time—I don't know—there was a clap of thunder—the lightning struck—a wall came down and we were all free."

"Who were free?" asked the Professor.

"We were.—Yes, who?—All of us convicts, I suppose.—And then there was something after that; I don't know what it was, only that it was *good*."

He turned to the Professor and said calmly:

"But his will be done—even if it is eternal damnation."

The Professor stared speechlessly at this man, who had the power himself to will his own eternal damnation, if it was God's will.

If his brain did not burst, if his heart did not break, he would inevitably find out one day that he who is strong enough to go willingly to hell, because he knows that is God's will with him, has conquered hell itself and destroyed it.

LV. Two Worlds

DAHL suddenly felt that the moment was at hand when, with the precision of long habit, his body would be rested and capable of receiving impressions. He had a familiar dual feeling that he had to hurry, as it was a long way home, and that he might be easy, since the return journey would take no time, or hardly any.

He directed his thoughts to his room in Copenhagen and moved—at a speed scarcely inferior to that of thought—through the air, over land and water, to the house in Frederiksberg Allé.

As usual, he passed through the wall at the height of the first floor and entered the corner of his room. Over in the bed lay his body with eyes closed. If only the brain, as so often happened, were not full of automatic suggestions! He paused for a moment to recall everything he had experienced. He knew the importance of getting as much as possible deposited in the brain at the very first moment.

Now.

He felt as if he were being bound tightly with heavy ropes and a lead weight were attached to him. The next moment he opened his eyes and sat up in bed.

He had succeeded! For the first time. He remembered! At last his long training had had its effect. His brain was tamed, self-hypnotized to lie empty, in expectation, without forming automatic conceptions which prevented him from impressing his outside experiences upon it.

He had come from a meeting with foreign occultists, mostly Englishmen and Indians, and they had——

It failed him.

His brain, which had been kept by autosuggestion from putting together any casual hash of the day's doings while he was away, could not obey him now that he was using it himself. For a moment he had been occupied with the difference between his sensation in the body and outside it. His thoughts had been side-tracked, he was reflecting instead of remembering. He was

again inseparably connected with his physical brain and could do nothing without it. He knew that he had experienced something a long way off, and that a moment ago he remembered it all. But now the whole thing was gone. All that was left was a clear idea of a passage through the air and in through the wall, succeeded by a feeling of heaviness. It was even not entirely unthinkable now that he had only been dreaming.

But the idea of floating through the air was so lively that he thought he must be able to do it at any time.

He closed his eyes and banished every other thought. An energetic training for several years made this possible. The idea of floating lightly and freely was supreme. Then he felt a release from something which in a way was himself; it was followed by a slight fear, which he suppressed—and the next moment he was out in the air again, free and light, on a level with the first floor above Frederiksberg Allé.

Now if he could only have one single experience, easy to remember, which would not take long to transfer to his brain! Preferably something which he could check in his physical body later in the day.

He was moving over the town in the direction of St. Jörgen's Lake. He recognized it all—even in this state, where he had no sense of the solidity of the houses. It was quite natural for him to be able to go clean through their walls. But at the same time he knew by experience the dreamy aspect this excursion would acquire when he was back in his physical body. And unfortunately he could not deposit any object in any place, to prove to himself later that he had actually been there.

Where? Ah, there was Gamle Kongevej. And there stood No. 23, where Mrs. Sonne used to live. Had she moved, or——?

He went in through the closed front door and walked upstairs, well knowing that he need not have done so, but might have passed straight in to the fourth floor from outside.

He entered the hall, the drawing-room. It was the same room in which he had so often sat. So Mrs. Sonne was still living there. And Katharina?

He looked about the room. Not much was changed in it. The captain's photograph stood on the writing-table, but the *cappellano's* was gone.

But he had so often been in this room that perhaps when he came home he would imagine that he had only been dreaming

about it. What if he went into the rooms he had never seen, came back during the forenoon, and recognized them? That would be convincing proof—not to others, of course, but to himself.

He went out into the hall and in through one of the closed doors. He was in the kitchen. He had a good look round. Plate-rack there. Salt there; two gas-rings. A coffee-pot standing on the range. Table there. Two plates with remains of food; a coffee-cup half empty.

He went rapidly through the other rooms.

In the bedroom Mrs. Sonne lay asleep. She was lying on her left side. On the table close to her head stood an alarm-clock. It showed twenty minutes to five.

He looked at Mrs. Sonne. It was at least three years since he had last seen her. Her hair had turned quite grey.

Suddenly she made a movement, as though struggling with something. Immediately after, she opened her eyes and gazed straight at the spot where he stood.

She looked surprised, half scared, turned to the clock, and then said half aloud: "That was strange."

She continued to gaze vacantly in his direction; he had an illogical feeling of fear that she might see him, and hurried out.

A moment later he was in his own room, felt the familiar heaviness, opened his eyes, sat up in bed, and remembered it all clearly.

He dared not go to sleep again for fear of forgetting it altogether, or preserving nothing but a dreamy recollection. He dressed and went out into the avenue and on, by the roundabout way of streets, to 23 Gamle Kongevej. The front door was closed. He decided to go up there in the course of the forenoon and see whether Mrs. Sonne really was living there still.

It struck him that he had seen nothing of Katharina. Was it perhaps imagination after all?

It was hard to have to wait till people got up. By nine o'clock he was back at 23 Gamle Kongevej.

This time he was obliged to use the stairs; it seemed a long way up to the fourth floor.

He had to wait a little while before the door was opened. Then Mrs. Sonne appeared. She stared at him with a surprised, almost a scared look.

"It's awfully early to call," he said apologetically, "but I had an irresistible desire to talk to you."

"Yes, yes," she said; "you're welcome. Come in."

They went into the drawing-room, where everything was as it had been in the early morning and in old days. The *cappellano's* portrait was indeed gone.

"Yes, I'm living alone now," said Mrs. Sonne, following his eyes round the room. "Katharina is married, you know."

"Is Katharina married?" He had a feeling that they were talking of something far away, unreal, as though Katharina's life and destiny had been something in a novel.

"Yes," said Mrs. Sonne. "I thought you knew that.—Well, it's true you haven't been here since, but I meant from the papers. Her name is in them pretty often."

A bitter expression formed about her mouth.

"I never see the papers," said Dahl.

"I could almost guess that," replied Mrs. Sonne; "otherwise you must have known that she was married to Mr. Nedergaard."

"What—the man with the horses?"

"Yes, the man she was always riding with. A friend of her father's. Yes, there was a great difference in age; but she *would* do it. It was just after Christian Barnes had gone to America. In fact, it was only a week later that she was married."

"Then she is well off," said Dahl.

Mrs. Sonne shrugged her shoulders wearily.

"I suppose so. I don't see much of her. Her ways are not mine. I have a feeling that she avoids me because she *will* not be reminded of the time she was living with me. It's certainly a different life she is leading now. Well, it's mostly from the papers that I know about it. I have only to read about first nights, the races, fashionable seaside places—everywhere I can hear about 'the beautiful Mrs. Nedergaard' and her dresses. Nedergaard himself I never hear of.

"But what about you? How have you been all these years?"

He answered evasively that he had been living a solitary life of study.

"You have grown older," she said, scanning him. He was thin, with deep lines below the mouth, the marks of continued strain. His gaze was calm and firm, with a tendency to become fixed. "Yes, you have changed a great deal," she said; "and

yet—and yet—do you know,” she interrupted herself, “I was almost frightened when I saw you standing at the door. No, not on account of the change in you, but because I’ve been thinking of you all the morning. And then you suddenly appeared.—It made me quite superstitious; I thought there was something you wanted—something you *had* to say to me.”

“I only came to see how you were,” he said. “But, now I’m here, I have an odd fancy to be shown over your flat. I can’t say why, but I should like to see it tremendously.”

He looked at her with an apologetic, boyish smile.

“Now you’re like your old self!” she exclaimed. “Though you were generally more serious in those days.—Yes, of course you may see the other rooms if you like, but you must excuse their being rather untidy. My maid is from the country—she’s gone home for her brother’s wedding.”

She showed him over the flat. Everything was as he had seen it earlier in the morning.

“Ah—I didn’t want to show you that,” said Mrs. Sonne as he opened the door of the kitchen. “It doesn’t look nice. I was late in getting up this morning. I woke very early—I think it was because I was lying on my left side—I always sleep on my right. Well, now again it seems so strange that you should really be here. For just before I woke I happened to think of you so vividly that I almost imagined you were there. I couldn’t get rid of the impression and it kept me awake from before five till past six. But then I fell asleep and didn’t wake till half past eight. That’s why things are in this state. Last night I was too tired to wash up.”

He stood there looking at the two plates with remains of food and the half-empty coffee-cup.

LVI. The Infanticides' Hell

“REALITIES?” said the occult teacher.

“Yes,” replied Dahl. “I am seized at times by a bewildering fear of losing the power of distinguishing between real and unreal. I am terrified at the illusory life of others and afraid of becoming—or possibly already being—as they.

“I have seen an old woman who had no idea that she was dead. She was spellbound in an existence which was neither life nor death, bewitched by anxiety for her son’s salvation. A simple suggestion on my part set her free. She saw her heaven and, I suppose, she was taken up into it.”

“Certainly,” said the occultist.

“Well, but is that heaven *real*?” asked Dahl. “Or is it only another creation of the fancy?—I have seen a professor sit here brooding over hair-splitting problems of philology, exactly as he did in the world he had left behind. Is that conceivable, or was I mistaken?”

“If he was only a narrow-minded specialist, it is very conceivable,” answered the occultist.

“Well, but the books he was reading,” said Dahl, “were *they* real?”

“Conceivable,” answered the occultist.

“I have seen a miser,” Dahl went on. “He sat piling gold pieces on top of one another. I couldn’t very well regard them as real, but he did so. This sphere is so full of imaginary things that I sometimes have to ask myself: Am I, who see the others’ ‘Maya,’ am I myself ensnared in a similar one while I believe I am being instructed and doing work? Why, even in the daytime, when I’m living in my body, I am suddenly seized by this very doubt in the face of the solid objects of the physical world. And then I am overcome by a fear that my powers of distinguishing are not strong enough. I ask myself: What is real and what is unreal?”

“That is because you are not yet *free*,” said the occultist. “Everyone who is not free is wrapt in the veil of Maya, of

illusion, as you said yourself. I am too. I am only a seeker. But we are all working with the measure of clarity we have, towards a yet greater clarity. The *reality* of our life, our hell and our heaven depends on our soul's degree of freedom or bondage and the consequent degree of clarity.

"Come and see."

They moved away in a direction indicated by the occultist. All at once he stopped and pointed forward.

"Now go on and see for yourself," he said.

Dahl looked ahead, but could discover nothing. There were not many people in this region of the astral plane. The few who were in motion here turned suddenly out of their course at a particular place farther on and moved to the left, as though to avoid something. Indeed, it appeared that they had no choice. They seemed to do it unconsciously, according to a natural law, as chaff from a machine is blown to one side by a gust of wind.

"What is it that they are avoiding?" asked Dahl.

"They don't know it themselves," answered the occultist, "but they can't help it. Go on and see. You will be able to enter."

Dahl moved hesitatingly on towards something which seemed to him to be only empty air. When he reached the place where all the rest turned or were thrown aside, he felt no obstacle and floated on.

In an instant—as though he had merely floated over an invisible threshold—he saw a living, mobile whole, the details of which he did not at first distinguish.

He was in an enclosed space shaped like a rectangle. Above it lay a clammy mist, which seemed in an uncanny way to possess personal life. It swayed up and down, up and down, in a monotonous, disconsolate rhythm. The whole might be compared to a dance expressive of incurable misery.

On fixing his attention on a particular spot in this horrible, ghostlike, undulating mist, he began to distinguish individual shapes, and a moment later he saw clearly where he was.

The mist was composed of pale human forms, mostly women, though there were a few men among them. Their ghastly, morbid pallor did not belong to death, but to despair, self-accusation and horror. These unhappy beings all stood with their feet on the corpse of a child. A little dead child lay

under each of them—some were strangled, with visible marks of cord or fingers, or with a pillow over the mouth, others were cut in pieces, which were constantly joined together and cut apart again each time the feet came in contact with the little bodies; some lay in water and came up to the surface, breathed and lived for an instant, till the feet touched them and they were drowned again, and the bright little eyes grew dim.

The undulating motion he had seen in what he at first took for a mist, came from the desperate efforts of these women not to tread upon the murdered children. With the energy of despair they raised themselves in the air a second, and life seemed to return to the corpse under their feet. The next moment their strength gave out and they sank back; the effort had only made it worse: they murdered the child once more.

Close as they were to one another, there was no intercourse among them. Each was shrouded in her own pain; it was wrapt about her like a blinding garment; they had no sense for anything beyond themselves, their children and their deed. Without consolation or intermission they repeated their up-and-down movement, swinging slightly backwards and forwards, never resting.

Dahl floated on over the rectangular space; he wanted to get away. But in the middle of one of the longer sides he saw a figure he knew, and stopped in horrified amazement. It was "the seraph"!

Bjarnöe sat staring downward, and as Dahl followed the direction of his eyes he saw a pavement of concrete; on the concrete lay a little boy of about two years with his head smashed and the brains protruding.

All at once the boy got up with a smile and began to climb on to the seraph's knee. The seraph leaned back with an expression of frenzied terror. The child crept on and tried to put his arms round his neck. A look of disgust came over the seraph's face, he struggled to let the little arms embrace him; but all at once the disgust in his face changed to hatred and rage, he struck the boy under the chin, the child fell backwards on to the concrete, his head was crushed, blood and brains were scattered on the pavement. The seraph hid his face in his hands and trembled.

"Bjarnöe," said Dahl, "is it really you?"

The seraph looked up. "Yes, it is I," he said. "But you—"

how do you come to be here among us?—Ah,” he said, with sudden comprehension, “you were an esoteric; you are an occultist and have come to see.” He collapsed inconsolably.

“But *you?*” said Dahl. “You haven’t—you *can’t* have——”

“Yes,” said the seraph, “I killed him.”

“Killed a child! But why?”

“I loved his mother,” said the seraph. “I have loved her since the first time I saw her. She was married when scarcely more than a child. I knew her the moment I saw her. She came towards me like a tone I had always been listening and waiting for. It was not long before we both knew it. But she was married. Her husband did not care for her. She was too seraphic, he said.”

“Ah, then she must have been a mate for you,” said Dahl.

Bjarnöe looked at him inquiringly, and he explained:

“We used to call you ‘the Seraph.’ ”

“Did you?” said Bjarnöe. “Well, in any case we were suited to each other. And her husband did not care for her, but deceived her with women of the coarsest kind. At last she told him she wanted a divorce; he could not refuse it, because she had proofs of his infidelity, but as he suspected her of loving another he had an attack of jealousy and revenged himself by making her a mother. If he had ill-used my violin, I should have been stricken with grief. But she was more than a violin. I went to see her a little while after the child was born. I am generally fond of children, and I looked forward to showing her child the affection which I knew it would not receive from its father. But it turned out very differently.

“I don’t know whether it was his hideous ear-splitting shrieks—the very tone of inconsiderate egoism—or his ill-natured face, or the fact that the child was, as it were, too big for her, just like his father, but I felt such a loathing for him that I could scarcely go and see her.

“The hatred I had conceived for him conquered me inch by inch. Then she suddenly got her divorce, because the husband took it into his head to marry somebody else. At last she was free and we could be married!—But no, we *couldn’t*. That is, we might go through the ceremony, of course, but we could never be *husband and wife*. I saw that, but she didn’t know it. I saw that the boy was drawing the vitality out of her all the time. He was appropriating her. She no longer had a life of

her own. In that child's face I could only see an insatiable appetite for food and amusement and an impudent stupidity like his father's. My hatred of him sank deeper and deeper into me and seemed to me justified. For it was the best qualities of myself and her that were being devoured by this coarse changeling. If he had only been able to feel how I hated him! But he always met me with a stupid, impudent confidence and, ever exacting, demanded that I should play with him.

"Then it was that it happened. She and I had had five poor minutes to ourselves, when the maid came and called her, because the boy wouldn't eat his dinner. She went out to see what was wrong with it, and there must have been something to see to, as she did not come back. Suddenly I heard the boy in the next room. I went in. I was drawn there by my very loathing for him. He had pulled a chair up to the window and was sitting on the ledge with his back to the street. He grinned with satisfaction when he saw me. I gave him a furious look, hoping that he might have instinct enough to feel that I was an enemy and be afraid of me. But he thought I was making faces to amuse him, and laughed. Then I went up to him and raised my hand as if to strike. He leaned back to avoid the blow; an evil look came into the sluggish eyes and the heavy under-jaw was thrust out defiantly. Then it was that I struck him under the chin, struck him as hard as if he had been a grown man.

"I can still feel the triumphant relief with which I saw his legs disappear from the window-ledge. The blow made him turn a somersault. I went back to the other room and sat down.

"When she found him on the pavement I carried him up and spoke words of comfort to her. I know I was as pale as if I had had no blood in me, but I felt no remorse. There were two persons in me: one who spoke the comforting words which I should have felt if it had been an accident—and which I did actually feel; but there was another in me, the satisfied murderer. I clearly felt that I was two, and thought: 'That is why I am so pale; there is not blood enough in me for two.' I was near going out of my mind, though I felt clear and calm. Afterwards—afterwards I understood, and fear was over me day and night. And it didn't last so very long. They said I died of a heart attack. Perhaps I had a heart attack; but I died of the fear of death. And of my punishment.

"Now I know what it is. Every moment he crawls on to my knee, smiling in his silly confidence. I struggle to let him do it. Sometimes he succeeds in putting his arms round my neck; incredibly strong they are, but cold and corpselike. Then it is that I hit him under the chin so that he falls on to the concrete.

"I know this is not 'real.' I don't believe, like the others in here, that it really happens. But what good does that do me, when this very knowledge prevents my sinking into the others' dull hopelessness and makes me sigh for my liberation?

"I know where it will come from—from myself. I have seen the first sign of it. It came once when I saw him get up and throw a hopeless look about him. His mother was not here, his father had never cared for him; he stood here, abandoned to his murderer. And I was filled with pity for this poor child, who could not help having come into the world, any more than he could help having received the nature that was his. I forgot that it was I who had murdered him, and only felt that here in this terrible place I would be both father and mother to this abandoned and ill-treated child. Then I took him in my arms of my own accord and kissed his cold mouth—and it grew warm and soft, and his arm lay gently about my neck.

"A moment after, I looked at his face, knew him, and struck him again.

"I know that the time will come when I shall look at his face, know him, and still keep him in my arms; and when that happens I shall be free.

"If you see him—himself, I mean, for this is not he, but only my own hallucination—if you see him outside among the other 'dead' children, then help him, if you can.

"And if you can do anything for the others in here, do it. They are worse off than I am, after all; they do not know that what they find here is the consequence of their deed; they believe they really do it over again. Perhaps they don't even know that they are dead."

The seraph ceased speaking. Dahl felt that the time he was permitted to be with him was over.

He hurried away. On leaving this place of torment, he turned and looked for the seraph. The child had got up and reached his knee; the seraph's form was shaken by violent emotion. Dahl had not the courage to see the result of poor Bjarnöe's struggle, but hastened away from this hell.

Outside the occultist met him with the question: "Now what is the *real* life in *there*?"

"In there," said Dahl, "*suffering* is the reality."

"Yes," said the occultist; "our sorrows and our joys are to us the *real* life—and they it is that overshadow and hide from us *God's own* reality. He who can pass behind them—or over them—he alone knows the *real life*."

LVII. Perpetual Motion

NEXT day Dahl tried to see Sophus Petersen. He wanted to question him about Mrs. Spange and try to find out whether her little boy had really met his death by falling out of window.

Sophus Petersen was not at home either in the morning or in the afternoon, when Dahl called again. Meanwhile it occurred to him that he had seen Kjellström talking to Mrs. Spange at Bjarnöe's funeral. As it was late in the day, the Swede would have left his work; he decided, therefore, to go out to the shed where he kept his machine.

The door of the shed stood open, but he could not see Kjellström, only the machine. The huge monster filled the whole space. But as he was going round to examine it more closely, he came upon Kjellström himself.

The little thickset man was sitting on a three-legged shoe-maker's stool, gazing before him. He was greatly changed. There were deep furrows in his mighty forehead, sharp lines ran from the corners of the mouth towards the chin, the cheeks were fallen in. He looked like a man who never slept and never had enough to eat. His thin frame excited pity, but his eyes were terrifying. They were far too bright, with a penetrating brightness not seen in the eyes of normal persons. It was a brightness that seemed on the point of breaking off and vanishing in the darkness of insanity.

Dahl put his hand on his shoulder, and Kjellström looked up, as though he had known he was there the whole time.

"How's the machine getting on?" asked Dahl.

"There it is," said Kjellström.

Ah, yes, there it was, the great lumbering thing; dull and lifeless it stood still, devouring the whole space. There was a heavy silence in the air; it seemed almost unnatural to speak in there, and Dahl had to force himself to say something.

"When do you think it will go?" he asked.

Kjellström thought a moment. "I can't say precisely," he

said after careful consideration; "but it won't be long now. There's *one* wheel wanting. When I find that, it'll go."

"Do you think you will find it?" asked Dahl.

"I know it," answered Kjellström calmly. "I've *seen* it—the missing wheel."

"But if you've seen it——" Dahl began, but Kjellström interrupted him:

"I've seen it *within me*. I am not yet able to see it outside of me. But I shall see it."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it.—Don't imagine that I'm a madman, simply adding one wheel to another and in that way making an everlasting machine which will everlastingly be unfinished. A machine for perpetual motion is unthinkable. Science has proved that. But what if it can be *viewed*? I have *seen* it with the eye of the spirit."

"Then what does it look like?" asked Dahl.

"Well, if I could explain it to you in thoughts and words, succeeding and supplementing one another—then I should be able to finish the machine," said Kjellström. "But I can tell you how I go to work, and when I have *seen* it. Then perhaps you will believe that I am not mad. I become profoundly absorbed in myself—deeper and deeper, until I come below the place where thoughts follow one another consecutively; I continue to be absorbed until I reach a point where I know nothing, except that *all limits have ceased to exist*. Then a consciousness begins to awaken, and I do not know whether it is mine or that of the Universe itself. And then I *feel* the wonderful mechanism of the Universe. And I stay there, waiting till I *see* the machine. I see it finished, *complete*. *And there is no difference between it and me*. But when I return with it in my soul and come back to the place where thoughts follow one after another, like a crowd of workmen entering a factory—then the machine falls apart, into all its separate pieces. And my thoughts begin to assemble them, each thought its part. But when I have to assemble all these parts—I find that *one* wheel has been lost on the way. And I don't know whether it is a big one or a little one. Nor do I know where it ought to go."

"Don't you think it would be better to give up this machine?" Dahl asked cautiously.

"Can I?" said Kjellström. "Can I cease to be *myself*? Can

I speak in another voice than my own? *The machine is myself.* I know I shall succeed. For I have acted as the saints. I have sacrificed *all*. I *know* I shall succeed."

Dahl saw that nothing could save Kjellström. The machine had swallowed him up. Though he thought it hopeless to expect a rational answer to an everyday question, he asked him for Mrs. Spange's address. To his surprise Kjellström at once gave it to him, calmly and soberly.

"I should like to have a talk with her," said Dahl.

"Oh, yes—then you've only to go there," said Kjellström.

"But I don't know her," Dahl objected.

"You're a theosophist; that ought to be introduction enough," Kjellström considered.

But Dahl preferred an excuse for calling. Kjellström remembered a book by Annie Besant, which he had lent to Mrs. Spange. "Say that you wanted to borrow it of me and that I referred you to her."

Dahl thanked him for the suggestion, wondering at Kjellström's having such readiness in dealing with the small things of life. At the door he turned and asked:

"Hasn't she lost a child?"

"Yes," said Kjellström. "It was a terrible thing. The poor little boy fell out of window and was killed on the concrete pavement. She feels it very much—I hardly think she will get over it. And perhaps she reproaches herself on account of the open window." . . .

Dahl found Mrs. Spange at home. She looked very poorly. Grief had made ravages on her handsome face and he thought she must have consumption. She was more like a shadow than a living woman. But when he heard her voice he understood why Bjarnöe, in speaking of her husband, had used the words: "If he had ill-used my violin, I should have been stricken with grief. But she was more than a violin."

Bjarnöe's portrait was on the table. Beside it stood a portrait of the child. Dahl examined it carefully, while she was fetching the book.

He knew the face well. The boy had the same smile in the photograph as when in Bjarnöe's hallucination he climbed up to put his arms round his neck. The right fist firmly grasped a little flute, just as it had so often fastened itself about "the seraph's" fingers.

LVIII. An Unfortunate Ascetic

ONE morning Dahl had a letter from the Swedish secretary of the occult school, telling him in so many words that Sophus Petersen had left the school. He was greatly surprised and decided to go and see Petersen at once and find out the reason.

Petersen was at home; he seemed to have just finished lunch and smelled strongly of beer when he opened the door.

With a very serious look he showed Dahl a chair and seated himself on the chastity sofa.

Dahl looked about the room and found it tidily kept. Petersen gazed at him solemnly from the sofa. His face was mournful and expectant. It was obvious that he looked for sympathy, and Dahl was willing to give it, if only he could find out what he was to sympathize about.

"I've had a letter from Sweden," he began; "from the secretary."

Sophus Petersen hiccuped.

"He writes that you've left the school."

Sophus looked seriously and importantly at Dahl and hiccuped.

"Did you leave of your own free will?" asked Dahl. "Or——"

Sophus Petersen hiccuped.

Dahl stared at him, speechless. He began to understand what was the matter with Petersen. The man was drunk! He sat there, solemn and mournful, in calm, profound intoxication. It was altogether incredible, but he had to believe his eyes.

"Well, but——" Dahl stammered.

Petersen nodded. "You believe I'm drunk," he said.

"Yes—that is——"

Sophus Petersen looked at him firmly and long. His countenance was melancholy, but not entirely free from a trace of pride over the shock he had given his friend.

"So I am, however," he said. His tone conveyed the significance of a man being able to go through such terrible things and yet retain his self-possession.

"You asked me if I had left the occult school of my own accord or from compulsion," he went on. "I left, however, both ways. I left of my own accord because otherwise I'd have been compelled, as members of the school mayn't touch alcohol."

"But you never cared for it!" Dahl exclaimed, altogether at a loss.

Petersen nodded. "Quite right. I don't care for it. But I'm forced to it. For otherwise I can't get drunk. Now you think I'm mad. I'm not."

He looked significantly at Dahl: now it was coming.

"I am, however, unhappy. Very unhappy." He pointed to Mrs. Lund's photograph. "If my unhappiness interests you, there it is."

"Has she—has she disappointed you?" asked Dahl cautiously; and Petersen answered in his meditative way:

"That is, however, the riddle, whether she has disappointed me, or I have disappointed her. I have pondered long over this riddle, and I believe I have solved it, and that it is I who have disappointed her—and for that I am now being punished with drunkenness—and other things. One cannot, however, be too considerate in dealing with a woman of refinement and spiritual interests."

"You're not going to tell me that *you* were inconsiderate," said Dahl.

Sophus Petersen's eyes grew heavy with profundity. "There are different ways of being inconsiderate—especially in dealing with women," he said. "Do you care to hear my story?" In the midst of his sorrow, which in sober moments was certainly no lighter than now, he showed a plentiful share of the drunken man's pride in the exceptionally tragic and complicated events of his life.

"We developed ourselves together," he said. "We developed ourselves pretty intensely, both of us. Development is more perfect in the company of a woman, for then you have the emotional life as well. But when the emotions take a part, you pretty soon come to caresses. Caresses don't matter either. They must, however, be kept within circumscribed limits." He looked very profoundly at Dahl and waited a moment to allow this truth to sink well in. "But there is, however, no stable limit," he continued with the authority of experience, "unless one is inconsiderate—from the start. One fine day either the one or the

other will overstep all limits to such an extent as to express a desire in such a way that the other cannot very well refuse to gratify it.

"But I held fast, however, to my development. The next day, however, I found I was left to develop by myself."

The honest brown eyes dwelt innocently on Dahl, awaiting comprehension of the intoxication which fogged them.

"She didn't come any more?" asked Dahl.

"No," said Petersen, "and when I asked for her at her sister's they told me she was out, though I'd just seen her go in.—I went through a pretty good deal in the days that followed. It takes, however, something to make a man with pretty lofty ideals sink as deep as I have sunk."

"So you have not met her since?" asked Dahl.

"Yes, I met her one day. She was walking arm-in-arm with a gentleman. I walked straight up to them, and she laughed in my face."

"She never cared for you," said Dahl.

Sophus Petersen gave him a sly look. "You think not?" he said. "You were, however, not present when she and I were alone together discussing theosophy. But you see, I *was*, and so I can understand her. For she laughed, however, in *defiance* so as to hurt me as much as she was hurting herself. And, you see, I had wounded her on a pretty sore spot. It was I who drove her to it."

"Drove her to what?"

"I know, however, all about their goings-on," said Petersen. The drunken slyness showed again in his face. "You see, I've spied on them, and I know very well who he is—he's a lawyer."

He nodded triumphantly. Mrs. Lund was not a woman to take up with anybody. He was a man of education, a professional man with a big practice.

The slyness died away in tragic brooding. "That same evening, however, I myself fell with a kitchen-maid from the tavern where I had gone to get drunk."

"But why in the world——?" Dahl began.

"Because I wanted to behave like her," Petersen explained. "It was revenge. But—but she'd only have laughed at me, if she'd heard of it. And what's the use of revenging oneself, so long as she doesn't know of it and it only drags one down? That's why I'm drinking. I had developed myself pretty well

and I'd got into the Oriental school; I can't bear to think that I've fallen so low. That's why I get drunk. And when I'm drunk I answer the advertisements in the agony column from ladies who are unhappily married. But I'm only waiting for a chance of talking to Mrs. Lund."

"What will you gain by that?" asked Dahl.

"I'll just let her know that I've carried on the same way as she has."

"What good will that do you?"

"Then she'll see, however, that we both feel the same about everything, and not only about spiritual things. And then there's no reason why she shouldn't come back."

"Do you intend to go on like this?"

Petersen was silent a moment. Dahl caught a glimpse of an obstinate determination from his sober hours behind the alcoholic torpor of his face.

"It won't last so very long," said Petersen. "I'm only going to wait a little while, till I see whether she's coming or not. When I know for certain, or when I can't stand it any longer, I shall go out to the swing-bridge one evening and jump in. That, however, is how *my* development will end."

"Why don't you go home to your wife?" said Dahl.

Petersen looked at him and it took him time to grasp that anyone could ask such a question. While he was waiting, his intoxication seemed to pass off. When at last he answered, it was in the voice of a sober, conscience-stricken man: "I've wrecked all that. She's an upright woman. I'm not going to hamper her with a man like me. A man that I'd have thrown out if he'd come to see me when I was living at home. I wouldn't, however, so much as have let a man like that talk to her."

He got up and went to the window, where he stood playing with the catch with his back to Dahl.

"I'll tell you something, however," he said in a low voice. "Our passions—both the good ones and the bad—they may pull us down, they may smash us altogether—but there was something in us when first a woman was ready to join her life to ours, and that—that, however, nothing can ever alter.—And if we fall below that, why, there's nothing for it but to go—down under and out."

Dahl went up to him. "If you think like that, you must go home straight away."

Sophus Petersen shook his head. "Never!" he said. "Emilie and I—that was *one* definite thing, and if it can't be the same thing any longer, it can't be anything at all. I once used to think I was above her—in development, I mean. I don't think so now. Even if she used to look up to me then. But if a woman doesn't exactly look up to her husband—she mustn't, however, look *down* on him, for then it's all over with what has been, and in the worst possible way. Especially for her.—Don't let's talk about that any more. Shall we take a little walk?"

They walked in silence through the streets of the inner city till Petersen stopped at the door of a bar.

"Well, I suppose you won't come in here?" he said.

"Are you going to start drinking again?" asked Dahl.

"I am, however, obliged to get drunk again as quickly as possible," said Petersen. "I have my time-table, you know."

He looked at Dahl's worried face. "Well, that's how it's gone with me," he said, and vanished through the door.

Dahl immediately went to Mrs. Emilie and told her everything. While he was speaking, her face was so tightly closed that he could see no sign of what impression Petersen's life made upon his deserted wife.

When Dahl had finished speaking, she stood up. "You need not worry about him," she said. "I'll fetch him home."

"He won't come," said Dahl. "He——"

Her eyes reduced him to silence. There was in them a wisdom before which male sagacity seemed to him mean and pedantic. He had not the slightest doubt that she knew what would induce Sophus Petersen to return.

Nevertheless he said: "Remember that he won't bear your looking down on him."

"Nobody is going to look down on him," she said quietly; "neither I nor anybody else."

Dahl looked at her a moment and then bowed his head in reverence, feeling that he was in the presence of the most beautiful, rich and perfect thing on earth.

LIX. "The Missing Wheel"

A CHANGE had come over Dahl. He was neglecting his psychical training and his recollection of experiences outside his body had become fragmentary and more like dreams than reality. One day it struck him with a feeling of uneasiness that he never saw his occult teacher any more. Strange, his meetings with him were always forgotten, though he remembered other things from his nightly visits to the spirit-world. In one respect, indeed, he seemed to be making progress: he was beginning to be a clairvoyant. At the moment of returning to his body he still *saw* forms and scenes from the spirit-world. These visions vanished slowly, as his consciousness began to function through his physical senses. His room and its furniture closed the door, so to speak, on the spirit-world. He decided to consult his teacher about the further development of the power of clairvoyance. But then he would have to remember what his teacher said. He carefully followed the prescribed exercises on going to bed, and left his body with the full assurance that next morning he would find his brain empty and receptive.

But when he opened his eyes he was laughing heartily at some mad tomfoolery worthy of a circus clown. He saw these tricks and thought they were real; but a moment later he knew he had been dreaming.

Dreaming? He had no business to be dreaming; he had to remember. He looked about him. He saw the world from which he had returned, and he saw by his pillow a little grey goblin watching his brain and making merry over the silly fancies he had managed to put into it while it lay there ownerless and expectant.

The vision vanished slowly. Dahl saw nothing but the room he lay in, but he understood it all. He remembered nothing at all of his night's experiences, knew no more about them than any other man who sleeps away the night. Of course what had happened was that, whereas he had expected to come home to an

empty house where he could deposit all he brought with him, the little grey man had waggishly filled it up with his hocus-pocus. As Dahl became one with his brain, these ridiculous ideas became his, and there was a stopper to all recollection.

The following evening he tried again to autosuggest his brain into unreceptivity towards any impression except those he himself brought from the spirit-world. When he awoke he knew that he lay at home in his room, he felt his bed underneath him, he felt his own body, but he still saw the astral world about him.

He saw it plainly, knew that he had just been moving freely in it; but all he had there experienced had vanished, all was forgotten for one terrible fact, presumably communicated by his teacher—Mai Skaarup was not what he had believed her to be. She was a disgraceful hypocrite, who had deceived her parents, Miss Dale and him with her angel face. In reality she had been a smart young woman who had played the harlot at all the summer resorts.

It was frightful, but he could not doubt it. For his knowledge came from a higher sphere. He looked about him: this sphere still surrounded him and was open to his clairvoyant's eyes.

He gave a start, and a violent indignation seized him. This devastating information about Mai Skaarup was *not* true and did not come from his teacher. It was a wicked lie, and its originator stood before him: the black figure that “Crooked Susanna” had seen in her delirium, and that had persecuted him on that night of madness when the numbers were written on the newspaper.

He tried to force him away with his will, but the figure gave an evil smile and came nearer, scornfully, defiantly. As a drowning man grasps at a plank, Dahl seized upon the mental image of the room he lay in, he tried to *see* it, constructed it in his imagination: the window over there—the door there—the wardrobe there—and suddenly the whole room was there, as though it had leapt out of empty air. The black figure was gone, the hideous idea about Mai Skaarup was an evil, meaningless dream.

But an unsafe feeling stole over him; he felt like a man skating on ice which will not bear much longer. Why had his teacher left him? Why was he suddenly left a prey to these evil influences? Had he, then, failed? Was he one of the victims?

But where had he failed? He was not conscious of having done wrong. His endeavours had been good.

He wandered uneasily about the streets the whole forenoon. He came right out to the northern suburbs, to the vacant plot where Kjellström had his shed.

What had happened to the little brooding Swede? he wondered. Had the machine smashed him, had his thoughts "fallen apart" and left him in darkness? With an uncanny feeling that an evil power was working for the downfall of Kjellström, Sophus Petersen and himself, he crossed the yard and entered the shed.

The machine stood there, huge and lifeless. On his three-legged shoemaker's stool sat Kjellström regarding it with a quiet smile. His eyes rested on the monster with an expression like that of a chess-player who has checkmated his opponent just when the latter thought he had won the game.

"How's it going with the machine?" asked Dahl.

Kjellström looked up at him, his eyes sparkling with a mixture of acumen and roguery. "It's going well," he said.

"What do you say?" exclaimed Dahl. "Does it go?"

Kjellström smiled calmly. "No. It does *not* go. It *cannot* go. And it *shall* never go. That is the secret I have penetrated." He gave a little clucking laugh, when he saw Dahl had now come to the conclusion that he had gone out of his mind.

"I told you once," he continued, "that the man who wishes to create perpetual motion must first behold the wonderful mechanism of the Universe. And I said I had beheld it. But never *completely*. There too a wheel was missing, which I could not *see*, though I could *feel* it. Now I have *seen* it. *I* am the missing wheel. I am not the artificer, only the wheel—a precious small wheel. But I know where it has to go. For the wheel that is known as Kjellström is a shoemaker. Just a shoemaker, nothing else. But that is a perfect thing, when it's in its right place. Its right place is on a shoemaker's stool, in the bosom of its family. *Why*, I don't know, only that that *is* its place. Now I'm leaving my machine and going to my job. I do so because it's mine. And whether I stand or whether I fall doesn't matter to me a curse."

He rose and looked Dahl calmly in the face. "Mr. Barnes used to say—and it was the truth—that you and I and Bjarnöe were searching for the philosopher's stone. Let me tell you where it is to be found. The philosopher's stone is a milestone by the road-

side. And if you want to know which among all the milestones, then it is—the next one. Keep going on: it will invariably be the next one. And if you want to know what Nirvana is, it is this: smile and do just what you are called upon to do, and whether you stand or whether you fall doesn't concern you a curse.

“Come, let us both betake ourselves to the place which the great artificer has appointed.”

LX. Mad?

DAHL was compelled to give up the evening exercises prescribed by the school. He *dared* not continue them. The feeling of suction which usually preceded the moment when he rose out of and above his sleeping body, began to alarm him, and when once this fear had taken hold of him it increased almost to terror; he could not even bear the idea of separation from his body. He wished he could fall into unconscious sleep like normal people, but unfortunately his clairvoyant powers were always active at the moment he reached the boundary between sleep and waking. Then he *saw* around him the spirit-world into which he knew he was about to glide, and he *dared* not. He was afraid of what might happen to his body while he was away from it. The result was restless sleep, interrupted by moments of waking in which he saw forms and scenes from the other world. Only after he had constructed his room in thought did he succeed in glimpsing or seeing it—according as it was night or early morning.

In the hope of obtaining the healthy sleep which, so to speak, begins from below, all the limbs growing heavy and sinking to sleep, drawing the brain with them, he spent the whole day walking about the streets in pursuit of tiredness.

One morning he had gone far out along the shore road, and on the way back he was at last overcome by tiredness. It came upon him suddenly with full weight as he was passing the Citadel. He dared not take a tram, as he was certain he would fall asleep at once, and if he stood still, he could not help sitting down. He had to walk home, though Frederiksberg Allé seemed many miles away.

He dragged himself along Bredgade, did not remember how he had come through Östergade, but discovered that he was in Amagertorv when an elderly gentleman with a quizzical face stopped him and asked the way to the Western Cemetery.

“Straight on,” said Dahl, pointing along Vimmelskaftet. “But it’s a long way; you’d better take the bus. There’s one just com-

ing." He turned and pointed in the other direction. Then he noticed that people were standing still round him and the old gentleman, and more came up. Another example of the Copenhageners' talent for making a crowd about nothing. What irritated him was that they all wore the same smile as the old gentleman; obviously they were getting some fun out of either him or Dahl. It was unpleasant, and he made haste to direct the stranger so as to get out of the crush.

"Take the bus to the Town Hall," he said; "from there you'll get a tram right out."

"Tram?" said the old gentleman with a laugh. "No, look here, I haven't time for that; I'm in a hurry."

"Well, then take a taxi," said Dahl with annoyance. He heard people laughing aloud and had a feeling that the stranger was making a fool of him. He noticed that he himself was the centre of the crowd.

"Taxi?" said the old gentleman. "Too slow, my boy!"

"Then, damn it, you'd better fly," said Dahl, hoping to turn the laugh against the funny old gentleman. He looked at the circle of people and smiled at them.

The laughter certainly grew louder, but nobody seemed to take any interest in the old gentleman; every face was turned upon himself. Now he had a chance of getting away, there was an opening in the crowd, people were being pushed aside; but the gap was filled by a policeman, who coolly took Dahl by the coat-collar, saying: "You'd better come quietly along with me."

"Come with you? Why?" He had a feeling that everybody had gone mad.

"Because you mustn't stand here making an obstruction. Pass along there," he said to the crowd, who did not obey.

"Obstruction?" protested Dahl. "It wasn't I that collected the crowd."

"Then perhaps it wasn't you that was talking to yourself and pointing and playing the fool?"

"But, good Lord! if the man asked me the way!"

"Man? What man?"

"This gentleman here." He turned round to the waggish old gentleman. But there was nobody there. "He's gone," he said.

"Yes, he's gone right enough," growled the policeman, "and we'll be going too."

He put his arm under Dahl's and drew him away. Dahl's

brain was working feverishly, as though he were up for an examination and had only five minutes to solve an impossible problem. "Where are you taking me?" he asked.

"To the station," said the policeman.

"The station!—Do you think I'm drunk?"

"Think? Why, I don't know when I've seen such a tidy skinful—not for the time of day."

"Wait just a second," said Dahl, who saw it all now. "Mayn't I walk alongside you, so that it won't look as if you were running me in? I won't run away."

The policeman looked at his pale face and thought for a moment. Perhaps the fellow was only ill, he didn't smell of spirits. "All right," he said, taking away his arm. "But no tricks, mind. If you're not drunk, what are you? What made you stand there talking to yourself about taxis and flying and all that?"

"I felt unwell. I was tired. I got dizzy, didn't know where I was. I thought somebody was asking me the way. I'm ill; but I haven't touched spirits for many years. Can't you let me go home?"

"What's your name and address?" asked the policeman, and made a note of it. "You'd better drive home," he said, and called up a cab. . . .

"No, I'm not mad," thought Dahl as he sat in the cab. "If I had been, I shouldn't have seen that he'd instantly take me for a lunatic if I told him the truth—that it was a dead man asking me the way to the Western Cemetery. And it's natural enough that a spirit should find trams and taxis too slow for him. I know something of the speed of their world. But why did he ask the way to the cemetery? And why did he smile in that quizzical fashion? There's something behind it. Let's see. Spirits have nothing at all to do with cemeteries or churchyards. But . . ."

As the cab drove on, he saw through it: the evil powers were plotting his destruction; the astral substance was plastic, it was easy to assume the form of an old gentleman, the question about the cemetery was intended to throw him off the scent afterwards, when he thought it over, since living people usually look upon churchyards as the abode of spirits.

He was clear and normal enough now. He could argue logically. He could pay the driver, see that he got the right change, and remember to give a tip, in spite of the shock he had had. But

at the same time he could see that there was danger afoot: the kind of clairvoyance which one could not control—which, indeed, could not be distinguished from ordinary observation—was worse than blindness. Better be satisfied with four senses than thus be endowed with six.

There was something wrong. He never saw his teacher now; his psychical powers were increasing, but in a strangely uncontrollable fashion. He had a helpless feeling, as though sinking in a sea of mud.

If only the policeman had been right—if he had merely been drunk!

Drunk! An idea struck him. The use of alcohol was forbidden in the school, because it destroyed the physical organs through which the clairvoyant powers operated. He went into a wine-room and sat down to drink. When he came out his wish was fulfilled: he was as drunk as the policeman could have desired. He was drunk, and knew it. Drunk, but not mad. On the contrary: from the mouths of children and drunken men one learns the truth, and the truth was that he would take his name off the esoteric school.

First of all, he had to sleep. He lay down on his sofa and slept the good, heavy sleep of the drunken.

When he awoke, it was evening. He remembered his decision and wrote to the secretary of the esoteric school, resigning his membership. But when he had stuck down the envelop, he dared not send it; he was afraid of being left friendless in the fight with the invisible enemies who were plotting his destruction. He wrote another letter, in which he gave an account of his condition and asked for help. When he had stuck that down, he did not know which to send. Perhaps it was best to sleep on it.

Sleep? He would hardly be able to fall asleep again after his long nap. He dreaded a night of struggle against all the things he did not want to see. There was nothing for it: he would have to get drunk again. He wanted peace; he dared not be sober. If he was sober he would go mad; in a state of drunkenness he was normal.

He went to the wine-room, which lay a couple of steps below the street-level, took hold of the door-handle, and looked half round to see if anybody was watching him.

"That is, however, how it's gone with me." A cold shiver ran down his back. Those were Sophus Petersen's words as he en-

tered the bar and gave Dahl a look. "I am, however, obliged to get drunk again as quickly as possible," he had said.

Dahl hurried back to the street. He dared not go in, the example was too dreadful. But what was he to do? He dared not stay sober and he dared not get drunk.

A little man with a springy step crossed to his side of the street. Without thinking, Dahl began to follow him. There was safety in company, especially if he didn't have to speak. It was pleasant to walk behind this man. What sort of a person could he be? He might be an acrobat: there was an elasticity about his whole frame, his back seemed wonderfully alive; but otherwise his figure suggested the open air rather than a circus. He couldn't say why, but it did so.

The man went along Frederiksberg Allé, in the direction of the churchyard. There was nobody about. Over on the other side of the avenue a lady and gentleman were walking; that was all. Ah, there came three men in the opposite direction.

Now they stopped and said something to the lady; one of them made a grab at her. Her companion stepped forward and spoke loudly and threateningly to the fellow. The little man ahead of Dahl stopped, looked across, and slowly approached the group.

The fellow opposite was gesticulating and making excuses, but suddenly he caught hold of the gentleman's coat and pulled him towards him; the rough's head went down and butted his victim, who fell to the ground; the lady uttered a loud scream.

Dahl ran across without any real thought of helping, he could do nothing against three roughs, but perhaps they would listen to reason. The little man, however, was already in front of the lady; the rough had got hold of his coat and was beginning the same manœuvre. Dahl saw the little man's springy back curve slightly and straighten itself with a jerk; the rough went down without a sound, his chin had met the sharp, paralysing blow of a clenched fist.

One of his two companions dashed forward, but encountered a left-hand blow which caught him on a vital spot and sent him backwards; Dahl heard a crack as his neck hit the pavement. Meanwhile the third ruffian had got behind the little champion and thrown his arms round him. Dahl shouted "Police!"; the little man dropped on his right knee with his left leg extended so that the foot almost touched Dahl, who saw a hand snatch at the rough's sleeve and just had time to get out of the way before

the man's clumsy body tripped over the outstretched leg; his back came smack on to the pavement, and the little acrobat was sitting astride his chest with his hands crossed in a grip of the man's coat-collar, one wrist pressing against his throat. The lady was kneeling beside her husband, who lay unconscious with a broken nose. A heavy step was heard; a policeman took hold of one of the assailants, who was already on his feet again.

When the policeman had surveyed the situation and been given a brief explanation, he said to Dahl: "Will you please fetch a taxi while we look after these fellows?" He and the stranger each had a good hold of his man; the third rough, whose head had struck the pavement so hard, had not yet recovered consciousness.

Dahl ran down the avenue, and as he did so, his brain worked feverishly. There was something wrong with this too. The policeman, the roughs, the man with the damaged face, the lady and the fight itself were real enough. He could not doubt that; besides, he was carrying out the policeman's order. But during the short explanation he had looked at the acrobat's face, and it had smiled at him as though it knew what his thoughts were and wanted to tell him they were right. Now he only hoped it would not turn out to be all imagination when he came back with the cab, like the old gentleman in Amagertorv, who had vanished as soon as he wanted to refer to him.

He came back in a taxi and looked cautiously out. Yes, they were all there, indeed two more policemen had arrived. He got out and the wounded man and his wife took their places in the cab. Two of the policemen secured the prisoners; the third said: "I just want you two gentlemen to give me your addresses for the report." Dahl cheerfully gave his name and address, ready to laugh aloud in the exultant feeling that there was nothing wrong with him.

But when he heard the stranger's name he grew stiff and was on his guard. For the stranger had answered: "Barnes, Savoy Hotel." Whereupon he turned to Dahl with his teasing little smile, and when he saw the other's reserved and hostile face he laughed aloud and said to the policeman: "This gentleman and I have met before, but he doesn't quite believe that it's me."

The policemen went off with their prisoners; Dahl was still staring at Barnes in bewilderment, between doubt and hope. "But—but is it—*really* you?"

"Yes, it is," said Barnes, "and I don't wonder you find it hard

to believe.—Shall we walk back together? Would you care to come up to the hotel? I expect we have a few things to tell each other.”

He took his arm and drew him off. Dahl felt a glad security, just as when Barnes, in his first year at the grammar-school, had promised to help him with a mathematical problem or a Latin exercise.

“How have you been all these years?” asked Barnes, and Dahl replied evasively that he had led a solitary life and only—well, studied. “But you,” he said, “how have you got on?”

“Well,” said Barnes, “at any rate I got what was good for me, and that’s the main thing. And latterly I’ve had a good time too.—Do you turn in early, or will you come up and jaw a little?”

Dahl had very little thought of turning in early.

LXI. The Miracle

“**W**HAT do you say to a whisky and cigar?” asked Barnes, when they reached his little room at the Savoy Hotel.

Whisky? Yes, Dahl would like something to drink. His feeling of security was growing. Think of being able to drink whisky, not simply to get drunk and sleepy, but for the sake of cosy conviviality! He felt happy as he watched Barnes puffing at a black cigar. Could that tanned, active fellow really be the once cadaverous and weakly Christian Barnes?

“Tell us all about it!” he begged; and Barnes laughed, for Dahl was just like a schoolboy who was drinking on the sly in a chum’s room and wanted to hear stories.

“Well,” he said, “as you know, I went with Miss Dale to California, to Los Angeles, to go to her school.”

“Yes, yes,” said Dahl.

Barnes took a good pull at his whisky.

“But it wasn’t she who taught me to drink whisky,” he said, noticing how Dahl was impressed by the way the drink was disappearing. “I don’t think she would like it exactly. I’m not in the habit of taking such big gulps either, but that little dust-up in the avenue has made me thirsty.”

“How is Miss Dale?” asked Dahl.

“Well, I think,” answered Barnes. “She is dead.”

“Is she dead?”

Barnes nodded. “She died last autumn.—Otherwise I should scarcely be sitting here.”

“Would you have stayed at her school?”

“Oh, well, I can’t exactly say I’ve been at her school the last couple of years—though I was in a way. And in a way I shall be for the rest of my life—though not one of the show-pupils.” He smiled his old bantering smile.

“You remember, I went to America to find the philosopher’s stone and witness the miracle. The miracle I may well say I have witnessed. The stone, on the other hand, I’ve decided to

leave where it is. I'm not sure it's worth having. Perhaps the real philosophy consists in its being so well hidden. But I can tell you about the miracle, if you care to hear it."

Dahl was more than anxious to hear.

"Miss Dale had a school at Los Angeles right enough. She called it a school. It might also be called a boarding-house. A number of her pupils were set to work in the house. But there were certain hours when we all assembled to be instructed by her in—in—I think it's best to call it mental hygiene. That expression pretty well covers the collective instruction. Apart from that, she took us individually and dealt with each as she thought we required. For my part, I was put to cleaning windows and washing up the kitchen.

"You're surprised? Well, so was I. I washed up and wondered and waited; and in the meantime I tried to keep a hold on my thoughts, for I found out that she knew them. After I'd finished work she used to say to me: 'To-day you were very nearly awake while you were washing up, Mr. Barnes,' or: 'You were very absent-minded while you were cleaning windows, Mr. Barnes.' Please note that she was not present while I was engaged in these operations. Others of her pupils she treated in the same way as Mai Skaarup. They told me they sometimes saw the angels. I won't deny that I thought that was just the thing for me. That would be worth going to America for. So I cleaned my windows industriously and tried to keep my thoughts fixed on them, in the hope of one day being moved up into the angel class."

He paused for a moment and looked at Dahl with his droll smile. "I haven't seen any angels," he said. "On the other hand"—he laughed heartily—"she let me see a good crowd of lusty devils."

He sat with his head on one side and a roguish look in his eye, like a man recalling merry times. He took up his glass and drank. "Cheer ho, boys!" and he laughed again.

"Well, we were talking about the school," he went on. "When I had been there some time, I began to hint to her that some of the pupils were allowed to become clairvoyants and see angels, while others had to be content with looking after the windows. 'I educate my pupils according to their character, Mr. Barnes,' she said, 'and it does you more good to clean windows than to look out for angels.'—Yes, it may sound queer, but there's no doubt she gave very serious attention to my character and my whole psyche

—how serious, I did not know at that time. I shall bless her memory to the last hour of my life. I have never met and never shall meet anyone like her.”

He was quite changed and sat for a long time in profound and solemn silence. But then the smile came back to his face.

“I can’t tell you much about her,” he said, “or about what she used to say to me when we were alone. It would take a whole year, and it would take a whole lifetime to become what she—rightly—insisted I should become. But I can tell you about the external happenings of my life. One day she came to me and said: ‘You have been much more awake lately, Mr. Barnes. You wash up excellently and you clean windows quite charmingly. It’s time you were moved up into another class.’ I was delighted—but rather too soon. She took me down into the hall, and there I saw the most singular apparition I’d ever set eyes on: a huge fellow with shoulders like a doorway, a hat like a tent, and a face like a hawk. His feet were encased in a terrific pair of boots with impossible high heels and long spurs; a revolver as big as a small cannon dangled at his hip; he wore a red shirt and had a blue handkerchief tied round his neck. He looked as if he’d come straight out of the worst kind of Wild West story. ‘See here, Bill,’ said Miss Dale, ‘this is the man you’re to take with you.’ ‘Sure,’ said the monster. I was rather curious to find out whether this creature with the tent and the gun was one of my new class-mates or possibly the teacher himself. Well, now you’ll think I’m lying, but, if so, you’ll have to disbelieve what happened this evening too. I asked Miss Dale where I was going, and she told me she had a friend who was foreman on a ranch in Montana. I was to go there for a while. You may be surprised at my obeying her blindly, but if you’d been there when she talked to me alone, you wouldn’t wonder any longer. You would have obeyed her just as blindly—and you wouldn’t have regretted it.

“I went with Bill to Montana. Luckily most of the journey was by rail. When we’d gone a good way I asked him his name. ‘I’m Sinewy Bill,’ he said. I preserved a respectful silence, guessing that this name was well known in the circles he frequented. And, by the Lord, it was known, both for good and evil. I may as well tell you at once that the man’s name was William Stone, but nobody in the whole cattle country ever thought of calling him anything but Sinewy Bill. He was a cowboy on the ranch in Montana. He had landed there after a wild

life with many a narrow escape from jail. Once, I believe, he *had* been inside for a time. After running riot from Texas through Arizona and Wyoming right up to Montana, he came riding up to the ranch one day, asked for a job, and got it. The foreman knew Sinewy Bill, but he was a bold man and wanted a fellow who could break horses. There wasn't anything wrong with Bill either, when he was sober, but whisky made him mad.

"Miss Dale used sometimes to stay a week or so at the ranch; it reminded her of her childhood on the prairie. One time she arrived just as Bill had one of his fits. He sat in the blacksmith's shop with a bottle of whisky, a revolver and a pile of cartridges, singing and cursing and shooting at everything that came near. The foreman was wild. He didn't want to lose his best hand, but there had to be an end of it. He wanted to use the blacksmith's shop, but Bill fired whenever anybody came near, and Bill was a damned good shot.

"Then it was that Miss Dale went to see him. Bill didn't shoot. What happened in the blacksmith's shop nobody knows but she and Bill. But since that day Bill has obeyed her like a little dog. In fact, he's one of her most faithful pupils. I talked to him about her while we were in the train. 'She's a great woman,' he said, 'the strongest I ever saw. I can break wild horses, but she can break wild men.' Yes, Bill was tame now and she was proud of him. Well, we travelled on and on—it's a long way from Los Angeles up to Montana—but at last Bill said: 'There, that journey's done.' That was *his* way of looking at it; mine was going to be something different. He dragged me off to a couple of horses, was astride of one of them in a second, and invited me to climb up on to the other. 'I can't ride,' I said. He glared at me with no more comprehension than if I'd said I hadn't yet learnt to walk. 'Can't ride?' he said. 'Well, as far as I can see, you ain't no inv'lid, you've got two legs and a behind.' 'I dare say,' said I, 'but the last thing you mention has never sat on a horse and certainly won't stay there very long if the beast starts going.' Bill was a resolute man; before I knew what was happening I found myself lashed firmly in the saddle and noticed that the ground was running away under me at a furious pace, while trees and houses were jumping up and down. I can't describe that ride to the ranch. In the first place, there are no words strong enough for my sufferings, and, in the second, I was unconscious most of the time. When I woke up I was lying in bed, wondering why

they had put a saddle between my legs. There *wasn't* any saddle: I found that out on further examination, but my legs wouldn't believe it; it was impossible for me to bring them together. There wasn't a scrap of my back that didn't ache.

"The foreman came in and introduced himself. He had a letter in his hand and said: 'Miss Dale writes that you're coming as a visitor. You're welcome. I hope you'll like your stay; but as it says here that Bill's to look after you, I guess you ain't goin' to get no holiday out here.' He guessed right. Bill spent his spare time in educating me as a cowboy! I believe his idea was that he was dealing very gently with me. He had never had to work with such wretched material in a living human being. He declared that the only possible explanation of my flabbiness was that I was really born dead and didn't know it. I couldn't get away, partly because I was always too tired, and partly because Bill would have caught me at once. He had me in his charge, and he was training me as carefully as if I had been a performing dog. Later on I heard that Miss Dale had given him orders to be the death of me, slowly but surely."

Barnes paused and looked at Dahl, who exclaimed in astonishment: "Miss Dale!"

Barnes nodded seriously. "Miss Dale, yes. And Bill carried out her orders to the letter."

"Well, but—you're still alive," Dahl stammered.

"I arose from the dead," explained Barnes with a laugh.

"You see," he continued, "Miss Dale had said to me in Los Angeles: 'There are two things fundamentally wrong with you, Mr. Barnes, and you can't get rid of them without help. One is a rottenness in your spiritual life which was grafted in you in childhood and has grown up with you. The other is that you can't keep within your own limits. You're always prying into other people's mentality, and it weakens you more than you're aware of. But it's become a habit with you and you can't get rid of it any more than you could control a St. Vitus's dance.' 'That's why I came out here with you,' I said. 'I'll put you right,' she said; 'I'll give you a new and better consciousness; but first we must get rid of the old one.'

"That was what she used Bill for. He put me through it on horseback, with lassoing, rounding-up and all the rest of it, till I dropped like a dead man; and next morning he pulled me out again, still full of sleep and only half conscious. I became a

living automaton. There wasn't a thought in my head but tiredness; my aching limbs used up all the vitality there was in me. I was just sufficiently awake to fall asleep the moment he left me in peace, no more. I worked, ate and slept, but really didn't know anything about it all. I may say that I was unconscious for several months. My body was alive, but *I* was dead. I don't even know whether I remembered my name. Anyhow, I was too tired to say it. My goodness, yes, if anyone had asked my name I'd have said: 'The Kid.' That's what the boys called me. Christian Barnes was dead. Bill had been the death of him.

"But one day I discovered to my surprise, just as I was putting my foot in the stirrup, that I knew what I was doing. I *wanted* to get on the back of that crock—the quietest in the whole outfit, given to me because I was the worst horseman. I was *thinking*! I looked about me when I was in the saddle, and I actually asked Bill where we were going and what we had to do there. Two whole thoughts in connection! It was a great day; I was beginning to be as clever as a little child. Every day after that, I could feel my consciousness growing bit by bit. You don't know what a glorious feeling it was. With exercise, food and sleep my physique had grown so strong that it had got a little surplus, which was at once available for mental life—first applied to the simplest things, but gradually extended until one fine day Christian Barnes arose from the dead as—yes, I can say so—a new and better man. I told Miss Dale this one day, when I was on a holiday at Los Angeles, and she answered: 'Yes, Mr. Barnes, if you'd been taken in hand in time or had had more strength of will, you wouldn't have needed such rough remedies. But when I met you, your soul was not healthy. It was like a house with damp rot. The only thing to do was to pull up all the boards and lay new floors. Now you're healthy, but you'd better stay out there awhile yet, till you get a "firm seat."'

"Well, I stayed up in Montana. I began seriously to take a share in the work. Yes, for the last couple of years I've honestly earned my money on the ranch. But I still had a pretty tough time to go through. One day Bill came to me and said: 'Have you noticed how all the boys laugh at you?' I thought a moment and said: 'Why, yes, so they do.' You see, I hadn't thought about it, but I was sort of *brought up* with it; it seemed to belong to the nature of things. 'Well,' said Bill, 'I guess you can see you've been a regular circus for them all this time and they can't

forget it. But you've got to cure them.' 'How?' I asked. 'You'll have to whip one or two of them,' he said. 'Impossible!' said I. 'Jack and Archie will be the easiest,' said Bill reflectively. 'They could kill me with their bare fists,' said I. Bill looked at me critically. 'You told me Denmark was a small country,' he said; 'and, by the look of you, it must be so almighty small that there ain't room for a man to grow up. But, you see, there's *one* thing needful in this world we live in, and that's punching. You can't do without that, whether you give it yourself or somebody gives it to you. You've got to punch Jack and Archie. I'll learn you something that's good for a little man to know.' So Bill taught me what he had no use for himself but had picked up, all the same, on his sinful wanderings about the Western States. He pretty nearly knocked the life out of me once more, but he taught me boxing and the most villainous Japanese jiu-jitsu tricks. At last he said: 'Next time Jack or Archie gives you any sauce, you'll give them one on the jaw. The others you'd better leave alone at present.' 'I'm not vindictive, Bill,' I said meekly; 'I don't mind Jack or Archie having a bit of fun; I prefer to let them laugh in peace.' 'Well, the first time I see that, I'll half kill you,' said Bill, 'and the next time the same, and the next, and so on, till the day of judgment.' That settled it. The same day I gave Jack one on the jaw; he went for me, I practised my tricks, and in my zeal to please Bill I chanced to break Jack's arm with a Japanese grip. 'What the hell's this?' the others cried. 'Well, the Kid's grown up,' said Bill. They admitted it, and after that we were good friends. Jack's a good boy and doesn't bear any grudge.

"A few days after that, Bill came and said he'd got a week off and proposed to take me for a trip to Yellow Creek. Yellow Creek is a little 'town'—a lovely little town, as you can guess. I asked what he wanted in that hole of a place. 'You want training,' said he, 'and we can't let you break the arms of the boys on the ranch. But there's a few in Yellow Creek that you can practise on and it'll do them good. Only look out they don't shoot. Well, I'm with you anyway.' I privately promised myself to be as gentle as a lamb in Yellow Creek, but whatever I did or did not do, I was everlastingly in hot water and had one fight after another. I believe Bill, who never touched whisky himself, took care that I always had a suitable quantity of alcohol on board. I fought every blessed day and at last I came to like it. I was

almost sorry when Bill said our holiday was up. He examined my left eye, which was bunged up, and my inordinately swollen mouth. 'You don't look handsome, Kid,' he said, 'but you shaped quite nicely.' I was fearfully proud and drank a whisky. As we rode home I was in high spirits, but Bill was sunk in thought. 'What'd you do if you came up against a man who took to gun-play?' he asked. 'Aim a bit lower than this,' I said, and sent a shot through Bill's hat. I had a gun dangling at my own hip now, but I can't have been quite sober when I took that liberty with Bill's hat. 'Devil take you, boy!' he shouted. 'You don't want a nurse any longer!'

"When we could get away from the ranch, Bill and I always went to Los Angeles, while the other boys got rid of their hard-earned money as foolishly as they could. On one of these visits Miss Dale said to Bill: 'He's all right. Now you must teach him to be still.' 'I can *do* a thing,' said Bill, 'but I ain't no good at explanations. You must learn him the preliminaries yourself.' So Miss Dale took me into my old room and there we sat for three-quarters of an hour without saying a word. I almost wished I was dead while we were sitting there, and yet that was the first time I felt a serious desire to live. Once, when I was a boy, I thought I saw into heaven—that afternoon I thought I *was* there. She gave me an explanation of what happened, but you can hear that another time. I can't better express what I felt that afternoon than by quoting the hymn: 'God's blessing from above poured down upon His congregation.'

"When I came out Bill looked at me closely—he was then quite different from the Bill I knew—and said seriously: 'Well, Kid, if the day should come when you can do this yourself, you'll be at peace then and for ever.' No, I didn't recognize Bill at all that day; I had only seen in him the fire-eater that Miss Dale had 'broken.' But after that I came upon him at moments when he was what Miss Dale called *still*. When his work permitted he was 'still' at sunrise, at midday and at sunset; and occasionally at other times, when he was alone. His wild nature was completely mastered by the stillness, by the still *devotion*.

"For my own part, I too have come to know this devotion. In it I have found the central point of my own being.

"I believe I once told you in one of our undergraduate confabs that I was hunting for the religious feeling. I was looking for it with my head, I tried to study it in other people. Now I go

about it another way. I have found it in my own heart, and my life's happiness, my spiritual harmony, is closely linked with its growth. But in order to grow, it must have nourishment, and you will probably be surprised when I tell you that I find that nourishment in my father's old church."

"Yes," said Dahl; "I never imagined that *you* would end as a Christian."

"I don't know whether there is any community that would acknowledge me as a Christian," said Barnes; "and that doesn't interest me either. For that matter, I don't see that any particular clique has the right to decide whether Christ would deign to accept me as one of his own. All I can say on the subject is that the old hymns and the Bible sayings which as a child I had to learn by heart, much against my will, now awaken a deep feeling of devotion in me. . . .

"No, I don't suppose you can recognize me; you never expected to find me a cross between a prize-fighter and a lay preacher! But in one thing you can see I haven't changed: I'm just as much of a chatterbox as I was in the old days."

"Are you going to stay at home now?" asked Dahl.

"Ah—yes," said Barnes with a sigh. "I shall stay at home. I thought I'd only come over on a short visit. But—now I have met old Pastor Barnes and seen his delight over the prodigal son. I won't deprive him of that. I shall take my degree. I shall have to work at full speed so as to manage the big 'round-up' in a year and a half from now."

"By 'round-up,' I suppose, you mean examination?" said Dahl.

"Yes," replied Barnes; "and then I shall be a schoolmaster after all. The idea appeals to me—only I wish one could teach boys in the open air! It'll be hard to get used to a frowsty schoolroom. But I'm looking forward to making boys into boys.—When will you be up?"

"I generally get up about eight," said Dahl.

"I meant for your degree," said Barnes.

Dahl thought a moment. "Oh, my degree—well, I don't know. To tell you the truth, I haven't been reading much for that."

"I could pretty well see that," said Barnes. "I guess you want a pacer. After the vacation we'll both set to work and see which will be ready first.—But now it's getting late and we ought to go to bed. I'll come round and see you in a day or two and then it'll be your turn to give an account of yourself."

LXII. Maya

IT had been a comfort to Dahl to hear Barnes's story, but when the question of his degree came up he was seized with a feeling of impotence. He knew he would never take his degree. He was incapable of applying his attention and his energy in that direction. A dull hopelessness weighed upon him, though he tried to console himself with the thought that it was only the result of tiredness and the lateness of the hour; when once he had slept everything would look different.

And indeed his first thought next morning was that it would be all right. Barnes had push; he would certainly take the part of tutor and force Dahl to do some work. It would amuse him to "rush Dahl through," he would enjoy playing the part of Bill. It all looked encouraging as he lay in bed.

But when he was up he felt he was not going to let Barnes order him about. He would manage it by himself. With this idea in his head, he stood dreaming for half an hour, tooth-brush in hand. On discovering this, he was once more certain that he would never so much as start reading for his degree. A dull despair smothered all his initiative; a dark dread of the future hid every alternative.

He went out with the intention of confiding in Barnes and possibly getting shaken up and supported by his powerful hand. But on reaching the Savoy Hotel, he walked past, feeling ashamed of himself; he could not bear to expose his imbecility to Barnes.

He walked on aimlessly; when at last he looked about him, he was out on the ramparts of Christianshavn. He felt he was tired. There was a tree down by the edge of the moat which had a homelike look. A big branch hung over the water, another lay a little farther back and higher up; it was a regular bench with a back to it. He went and sat down; the lower branch was just high enough to keep his feet out of the water. He sat just as comfortably as in his old "chair" in the hazel hedge at home. Even his peep-hole to the world was there—a round gap in the foliage in front of him.

If only he had never grown any older! Or if he could begin there again and live his life afresh! He could not understand what had made him so incapable in the things of life. He had been talented enough, he thought, and people had always been willing to meet him half-way. And his aims had always been good and lofty. How was it he had ended in abandonment and helplessness? Whence came this feeling of impotence in practical matters? How desperately vacant his brain was!

He laid his forehead against the upper branch and wished he could sleep into oblivion, forget all that concerned himself.

All at once he sat up and felt he was more awake than he had been for many years. He did not understand it at first, and when he did understand he scarcely ventured to believe it—he was once more in “the open,” where time does not exist, where nothing is either far or near, where the heart catches and speaks the wordless language of heaven. Through this language, from which seers derive their wisdom, in which mystics speak with God, he was given his last profound knowledge of himself. He saw the wavering of his weak character, when after his first fall he had neither had courage to persist in sin nor strength to turn away from it. He saw how, after experiencing the divine love and seeing it expressed in his own countenance, he had appropriated it as a personal accomplishment; he saw himself using others as instruments of spiritual enjoyment, without a thought of what it might cost them. Judgment upon him lay within himself, and the judgment was that he had thrown away the gift of life by transforming the grace of God into enjoyment and seeking spiritual growth and development for the sake of the delights with which it was attended.

He knew his fate. He was in the open, that is, in eternity. He who has lived in eternity cannot be eternally lost. He was there as a child, and beyond that he would never go. Hitherto he had wasted his life as a man, and not only that, but had spread sorrow and injury about him; and the rest of his life was forfeit, destroyed by his own actions. Like a stone that was tied to him, they would drag him to the bottom. The years that might have given him a chance of recovering himself and going on, taught by his errors, would never belong to his life.

Then eternity closed again, and he knew it would nevermore be open to him, while he was in this life. But when he was back on the top of the rampart, he thought that even if his life

was to be grey and almost intolerable, he might nevertheless go through it as a useful worker; and he went home to make a start at once.

At home, face to face with the text-books that had been neglected so long, he felt with dismay that he would never get beyond the intention; the life of resolution and action was closed to him. The active part of his being had died of atrophy.

He sat on the sofa and opened a note-book that had never been used. He could not bear to see all the blank pages; it was absolutely necessary that something should be written on them.

He took his pen and wrote two sentences, slowly and in a copy-book hand. He sat gazing at them till his feeling of impotence became one of weariness. Then he lay down and slept.

When he awoke he looked at the note-book, tore out the leaf with the two sentences, folded it carefully, and placed it in his pocket-book. He was so loath to believe in what he had written before he fell asleep.

He went back to the ramparts in the childish hope of once more receiving enlightenment and help in the same place. He no longer felt like a grown man. He had stopped at the point where he had last seen into "the open," during his last year at school. He had been put back to that point, argued and acted as he would have done then. He had a feeling that the grown-up part of him was already dead.

He went down and sat on the branch again, looked out again upon the world through the peep-hole among the leaves. It was so hopeless to think; he was a helpless boy. His thoughts were relaxed; he leaned back against the branch and floated off, as he had so often done before, into the semiconscious state in which elements of dreaming and elements of reality combined, now into wisdom, now into folly, occasionally into both.

The branches became the hazel hedge, the water became the road, the rampart the garden, where Kristen the sexton was digging. He had just given him back his pipe after playing with the lid, looking at the black hell on the under side, and the green earth of the hazel-trees and the grass, and making the sky grow blue with the love that came from God, who could not be seen; but when he came and showed himself, you could see nothing but him.

A smile of relief dawned in his face. Thank God, he had

only been dreaming. The dream of course was due to the lid of Kristen's pipe. He had been playing with it, and then he had fallen asleep. He had dreamt that he was grown up, that he had seen into heaven and felt God's marvellous love, had wandered about on God's green earth and made himself ill from eating its ripe and unripe fruits, had descended into gloomy, stinking hell, which had poisoned his whole being. Thank God, it was only a dream; a warning dream it should be. When he grew up, some day, he would take care to remember it, so that it might disclose to him life's artfully concealed snares. He had been given gifts to lead a better life than most.

Cheerfully he looked out through his peep-hole into the world of the living. The field across the road was green with lush grass. Within it stood a woman in a pink garment, beckoning to him.

He smiled a knowing, mysterious smile. There was everything in her, all that which never grows old, that which he had seen in Annine Clausen and Kirsten Per Smeds the day when he came round to the side of them that was turned towards the young Per Smeds and him who had been the father of Niels Peter.

It was all in her, her walk was a dance, her eyes drew his gaze and in them he met his own enraptured face. Her smile turned his head; she beckoned and he replied:

"At last you have come. I have been here every day watching for you. Tell me your name."

She smiled till he grew dizzy, as she answered:

"My name is Maya."

"Maya," he repeated; "Maya—I thought you were called Tine. But the name is nothing. I'm coming to you now."

He stood up and stepped out into the road.

The water closed over him.

LXIII. The Crossways

THE afternoon shadows were beginning to lengthen. The Professor was leaning over his garden-gate smoking. Suddenly he heard the quick trip-trap, trip-trap of a pair of wooden shoes and the puffing and blowing of a pair of overtaxed lungs.

It was Annine Clausen, incapable of seeing or hearing, since she was literally at her last gasp, but she *had* to go on, if it took a miracle to do it.

"Whoa!" shouted the Professor.

Annine was so scared that she nearly collapsed.

"Gracious me!" she said, "you did give me a turn. I can't tell you how frightened I was."

"I could see that," said the Professor.

"Yes, I dare say you could," said Annine, "and if you'd seen what *I've* seen and heard what *I've* heard and run like *I've* run, why—— I've just run over from the smithy, for I *had* to have a word with Kirsten."

"But Kirsten Per Smeds has been dead a long time," said the Professor.

"Yes, Kirsten's dead," said Annine; "she died of a Tuesday morning a year and a half ago come Michaelmas and I was there myself to lay her out and put her in her coffin and I've missed her every blessed time any little thing happened in the parish, for there wasn't anybody like Kirsten over a cup of coffee. And yet here I go running the best part of a mile and never thinking till I get to the smithy that both she and Per are gone and the new smith's a bachelor and over and above he isn't at home either. So you can just see how it's upset me. Oh, Lord, standing still's worse than running, I think; it's my heart that won't stop jumping."

"Won't you come in and sit down?" asked the Professor.

"No, thanks, that'd take too long. I *must* get home to Niels Peter and Martine as soon as they come off the fields, but I can

just as well tell it to you here at the gate, for you've always had a lot to do with Holger. Lord, how it makes me puff!"

"What about Holger?" asked the Professor.

Annine pressed her hand to her heart. "Well, wait a bit and let me get to where it's got to begin. Just let me get it to stop thumping like this. I've been running too fast and I'm too much upset and it's too much happening all at once; the thistles are still sticking in my stockings. Look here, my leg looks like a hedgehog but it can't be helped—it'll have to wait till I get to Martine's and take off my stocking and they're not all coming through.

"What thistles are those you've been collecting?"

"They're out of last year's grass, you know, up at Hill Farm. I'd been in town and I was crossing the field, the one on the top of the hill that goes down steep to the hedge by the crossroads. I got right up to the top and stood still a minute where you can see over the whole parish and right away to the town. 'Peace dwells o'er town and country, The worldly turmoil's hushed,' thinks I—like in the hymn—only it ought to be evening with the moon up and this was the middle of the day and the cows lay chewing the cud. I stood there looking over all the four arms of the crossroads lying under me just like the sails of a windmill, and there comes Holger walking along the road that runs out to the bog where he lives and he isn't so far from the crossroads already. But then I see another man coming along the road from Bakkeböl. 'Whoever can that be?' thinks I, for he didn't look like any of *us*. But then I see him give a jerk of the head and a swing of the arm that I've seen before, and then it struck me so I couldn't move a foot. And then I said loud enough for myself to hear: 'Well, if it's right and if it *is* him, this must be the Lord's own doing.' But it won't *do*, thinks I, it's got to be stopped, I must get one of them away before he sees the other. And then I started to run headlong down the hill—you know how steep it is—to get there first, and half-way down I fell over a tether-peg that I didn't see and went right into a big clump of thistles, the ones with the round blue tops. I hurt myself and they pricked me but I got up again, because this here—well, I'm going to tell you.

"When I got down Holger had stopped just by the turning, with his back to it, looking away to the bog, thinking or something of the sort. I thought to myself: 'How can I get through the

hedge without startling Holger and stop the miller before he gets to him?' But after that tumble over the peg there isn't time for anything and I hear the steps coming nearer and nearer, but Holger doesn't hear anything and I pray to God he may be deaf till the miller's gone past so I can start talking to Holger and keep him there. Then I see the miller pop round the corner at the crossroads and I think to myself: 'You're going straight to your death and you don't know it.' And it was all as if it had been got up for that and nothing else. Holger hears the steps and wakes up and turns round and then the miller sees him and recognizes him and knows his last hour has come, for he was just as if something had struck him and he couldn't move a foot. It made me think of Lot's wife in the Bible that was turned into a pillar of salt in a single second. It was too late for me to do anything, but if I can't stop it, thinks I, I'll look on at it, horrible though it may be; for what's going to happen now will be talked about many years after I'm dead but, for all that, it'll be me that saw it and told the story. But Holger wasn't standing right for me and I couldn't see his face. But the miller's went like ashes the moment Holger turned round and he couldn't go and he couldn't speak and he couldn't move a muscle. He saw his death in front of him and knew it was a cruel death. There was something about his hands as if he was trying to clasp them but couldn't. So I clasped mine instead. That was all I could do for him. I couldn't pray, I was too excited and terrified.

"Holger didn't move. I can still see his back. I feel as if I should never dare go to sleep again for fear of dreaming of that back. But all at once he lifted his right hand—just like this—and did this with it three times one after the other—with his fingers like this—what he meant was that the miller was to go. But the miller had no power in his limbs or in his tongue and he stood there without a will of his own, and I wanted to say to Holger: 'It wants a word to set him free, you must say a word to him, or else he'll stand there till you've murdered him.' But not a word could I get out, my tongue stuck fast.

"Then Holger did the same again with his hand and said quite still, but it was funny how plain it was:

"'I am not your Maker. Go.'

"And then the life came back into the miller and he went, but to see the way he went, it made me think: 'It'd have been better for him if he'd killed him.'

"And then Holger turned round too and when I saw his face I didn't know it. It was like what it says in the Bible about the last day; I don't remember what the words are, but when I think of Holger's face I see the place where it is, in Revelations. I was struck just like the miller and couldn't move hand or foot, while Holger was walking back to the bog. But then I ran as fast as I could over to Kirsten, who's been gone this long time. Ah, well, some of us expect our death and it doesn't come, and some of us forget death when it's already been there. What a queer thing life is, to be sure!

"And if that meeting at the crossroads was really the Lord's doing—and it can't have been an *accident*—how is it nothing at all happened? And what can Holger have meant by saying that he hadn't made the Vissingröd miller's man? For we all know there's only two can have had a hand in that—the man's father and God Almighty. If it isn't wrong to give God the blame for creating those we don't like—excepting of course the good there is in them. If there is any.

"But what did the miller's man want to come back here for? He'd gone away before Hansine died. Perhaps he never heard anything about her in America and she may have been on his mind, and then perhaps he came back for her to take her with him to America if she wasn't married to somebody else. We children of this world don't know what's going on in each other's minds. But I'm going after the miller's man to find out whether he knew anything about Hansine and Holger.—Are you coming too?"

The Professor had stepped out on to the road.

"No," he said; "I'm going to see Holger."

"Yes, do that," said Annine; "then perhaps we'll see one another later and each have something to tell."

The tired legs trotted on with their load of thistles. But the Professor went back into the garden; it had occurred to him that Holger must be given time.

Towards evening he was standing out by the bog with a smile on his face, for, like Annine, he had come to think of the old hymn, "Peace dwells o'er town and country."

His eyes swept over the landscape; the gently undulating hills lay there, always two and two, like women's rich, round breasts. The corn was golden in the evening sunshine and gave promise of early ripening. The dark-coloured grass of the bog, the black

peat with its impenetrable pools of water, added a still and serious depth to the country's rich and gentle smile.

Holger stood at the door of his cottage with his hand on his head and his elbow resting against the door-post. He stepped aside to allow his visitor to enter, but the Professor shook his head: "I don't exactly share your ideas of bachelor comfort, so if you don't object we'll stay outside."

Holger nodded and resumed his former attitude. The Professor sat on a stone which had been left over when the cottage was built. Holger's face was turned towards the bog, but whether he was looking far away or into the depths of his own soul, there was no knowing. The big face showed an immutable calm which seemed incapable of being disturbed. The eyes expressed not thought but knowledge, quiescent vision.

Annine had been reminded of the Revelation. The Professor was inclined to think he was in the presence, not of Holger, but of an incarnation of the whole district, lost in contemplation of itself. At last he said:

"What was the meaning of those words you used: 'I am not your Maker'?"

Holger did not turn towards the Professor; his face remained unchanged; and yet a new life came into it, a gleam of something personal which was not there before. A lake may lie calm and smooth, without a breath of wind to disturb it; but a light summer-cloud sails across the sky, and its movement can be seen in the lake, though it does not touch it. Holger looked like one who searches his memory for an event that happened long ago. Slowly awakening, and without yet looking at the Professor, he said:

"I stood before him and saw him there. At first I thought it was my own thoughts and not him. But then he stood as if nailed to the spot and nearly died before my eyes. Then I knew it was him. I wanted to smash him to pieces. Make an *end* of him, that's what I wanted. I found I did nothing. . . .

"I don't know whether what I'm saying now was in my head at the time or whether I've thought it since.—Yes—it was all in the feeling I had then. I know I had a hopeless feeling in me. He *couldn't* be got rid of. If I set fire to him and burned him to ashes, his ashes would still be in the world, his deed couldn't be made undone. I might have been standing there hopelessly

still. But the fear that tied him set me free. He had no hold on his own thoughts. They hung outside him, so I could see them. And I took them. He thought I meant to have *revenge*; and I felt that I could and would have that. I believed I had struck him. But he still stood before me. I hadn't moved hand or foot. I willed again, but my will hadn't the power to raise my hand. I couldn't understand it. He was in my power. I let him be. I couldn't understand it. But I felt that I *was understood*. I bowed my head and thought: 'He who understands me can also tell me what to do.' I looked at him again, and he was still nailed to the spot. But then it was no longer my *own* eyes that saw, for I saw not only him, but both of us standing there, not knowing where we came from, where we were going to, what sort we were, and why we were like that. I don't know how long I stood looking at the two of us, for the sight's there yet and will be as long as I live, and it seems to have been with me since before I was born.

"But when I saw again with my *own* eyes, then it was I said to him: 'I am not your Maker. Go.' I was going to add 'in peace,' but I couldn't. I saw he had a long way to go before he reached peace. He's wandering about at random and doesn't know where it's to be found.

"And when he went away I felt sorry for him. And I was no longer hopeless, for I knew that a man *can* be wiped out of the world. Only it wasn't him but myself I had wiped out."

His voice died away, as though it too had been wiped out, sucked up by the stillness about them. He was still standing in the same position with his hand on his head, his elbow resting against the door-post, and his eyes gazing straight before him with the contemplative vision of profound knowledge. After a while the Professor asked: "What are you thinking about?"

Monotonous, like the voice of a sleep-walker, as though his ego scarcely had a part in it, came Holger's reply:

"If it ever can be said, it will no doubt be said."

The Professor started at the impersonality of the expression. He had a feeling that Holger was slipping away from him. He stared at the immovable figure and thought he was watching a living human being slowly fading out of existence. The same vital instinct which makes one jump into the water to save a drowning man, even if death would perhaps be better for him,

seized the Professor. He tried to get hold of Holger's private consciousness and draw it up from the depth in which he felt it was about to vanish like a drop in the ocean.

He clutched at the vindictive instinct of a violent temperament and asked: "Don't you regret letting him live and go in peace?"

A slight movement, a mild disturbance came into Holger's eyes, as when a stone is thrown into a calm, deep lake. He turned to the Professor—as though waking with an effort—and looked at him as though there was a word he had not quite understood:

"Regret——?" His eyes moved round in search of something; at last they rested on the Professor with the liberated smile of utter poverty:

"Why, I have nothing to regret with."

LXIV. A Leisure Hour

THE little market town smiled with its warm red roofs as Christian Barnes landed from the boat. A friendly peace lay upon it, soothing the dark thoughts to which Dahl's death had given rise. He had heard about it the day before he left, when he called at the boarding-house. The corpse had been found; in the pocket were the two letters to the secretary of the esoteric school and on the back of the envelopes was Dahl's own address. In his pocket-book was a leaf torn out of a notebook, on which was written in a copperplate hand:

"I made of God's garden a pleasure-ground.
Now it is forbidden me to work in it."

His friend's death had moved Barnes deeply, and on the homeward trip he had constantly turned over in his mind the question of suicide or accident. Some information he had gathered from the only one of his fellow-boarders Dahl had shown any inclination to confide in, made both solutions look equally probable.

Here in the little harbour, which seemed designed for the Sunday pleasure of the townspeople, calm little memories of the past thrust aside his serious but unavailing speculations.

The last time he walked up this street he had thought his visit would be a short one; now he knew that this was to be his home. He turned aside to pass the grammar-school and stopped to look at it. This school or one like it would be the scene of his future work.

He stopped again outside the sweet-shop by the school. Aha, the same cream buns that looked as if they were left over from yesterday! No, he couldn't tackle those, unfortunately; but if he came across any little bright-eyed Helen Strömstad he'd soon invite her in.

There stood the big cherry-tree; how often he had walked along here with his eye on a certain gate, hoping to catch sight of a hat or a little plait of brown hair!

He found himself at the gate and raised his head to look into the garden—and then everything happened as it does in the kind of dream one still believes in for a little while after waking; the face was there—not quite as it used to be, but the expression was the same, it was all as it ought to be in a dream—not altogether what one thought, and yet right, just as one wishes it. The gate was opened, and he went in. Still he didn't understand how it could be so, but there stood Helen, just as she used to stand; he could see she expected him. She held out her hand and he took it, but didn't remember to release it again. He held it fast to convince himself that they were both alive and awake. He yielded to a pressure; did not know where it came from, but was forced to yield. It was all the years that were past and all the years that were to come meeting in an instant and forcing him to an act he did not reflect upon but merely experienced: he put his arm around her neck, pressed her cheek to his, and then kissed her—as a schoolboy kisses a little girl who has always been kind to him.

Helen stayed in his arms; they said nothing: all words were drowned in a deep peace, which held all the knowledge they needed of one another.

It lasted until he began to think. Then he let her go, his arms sank powerless, and he felt he was awake.

"I—beg your pardon," he said awkwardly, confused and guilty.

He could see by her expression that she did not understand him, and she could see by his that something was not right. Their confusion spread from one to the other and increased in both.

"Why?" she asked, turning red.

He looked at the ground and could not meet her eyes, because she too had forgotten herself.

"You are married," he managed to say at last; but his voice was so thick that the words could scarcely be understood.

And she did not understand them; she stared at him and exclaimed in surprise: "I—*married?*"

His eyes were quickly raised to hers, with something of the same look of surprise.

"Why, I thought—*aren't* you——?"

She shook her head.

"Well, but——?"

A thought occurred to her. "Oh, yes—I forgot. I was then. A little while—but that's long ago—I——"

She was not allowed to say more; he seized her and kissed her

—not like a schoolboy, but like one of “the boys,” a boy from Montana, who knew what he had in his arms.

When she came to herself she asked, wondering:

“Didn’t you really know I was divorced? I got it before you went away.”

He thought for a moment, for he wondered at it himself. At last he saw light. “I used to be an inquisitive fellow and fond of asking questions, but I could never bring myself to ask anyone about you. My God, how fond I must have been of you, Helen!”

Her eyes grew moist and he pressed her hand between his. As they had now begun to wonder about everything, Helen asked:

“Yes, but if you thought I—I wasn’t free, how was it you—you came through the gate as if it was the most natural thing——?”

“I wasn’t awake,” he said; “I’d just come from school and thought I had an hour off.”

Helen bowed her head. “You too,” she said, and the tears ran down her cheeks.

Barnes was alarmed; she felt it and said, before he had time to ask: “Dear me—and I’ve been living on that hour off all these years.”

“You too!” said Barnes, and as Helen looked up in surprise, he went on: “Do you know?—that was the only thing I took with me from home, when I went to America.”

They sat on the seat and told each other all there was to tell about that hour off—as they thought at the time; afterwards they had a better idea of the inexhaustibility of the subject.

“So we have always belonged to each other,” said Helen happily and with a touch of solemnity. Barnes laughed.

“What are you laughing at?” she asked. “You know it’s true.”

“Yes,” he said, “but it reminds me of a Sunday afternoon I once wasted at home in searching everywhere for a knife which was in my pocket.”

“Yes, but when you found your knife you didn’t like it any the less because you’d had it the whole time?”

“Oh, no,” he admitted, adding more seriously: “Perhaps more, because I knew what it meant to lose it. I can tell you, I took care of it. That was a lovely Sunday afternoon.—What day is it to-day?”

“It’s Thursday,” said Helen.

“Yes, of course it’s Thursday,” said Barnes; “it always used to be Thursday—but what day is it *this year*?”

Helen laughed. "It's really Thursday to-day—and this year."

Barnes looked at her half sceptically. "And to think that I was always looking for a miracle!" he said.

Helen followed the changes in his face from happy wonder to serious reflection. "What are you thinking about?" she asked.

He looked up at her with eyes in which lingering inquiry lost itself in immediate joy over her.

"It's no use brooding over what's past and done with," he said, "but I was thinking that if on that Sunday I had chanced to put my hand in my pocket, I should have found my knife without all that hunting. You say we have always belonged to each other, and that is gloriously, paradoxically true, as the facts of love ought to be. All the same, I have a feeling that at that time I shouldn't have been able to get you as easily as putting my hand in my pocket. But to-day, when I never so much as thought of it, I only had to walk through the gate for you to drop into my hands like a ripe apple."

Helen turned a trifle red. "That's perfectly true," she said; "it was *I* who proposed."

"Proposed!" exclaimed Barnes. "God bless my soul, we've forgotten all about proposing!"

"No," she said; "I saw you standing under the cherry-tree, looking as if you were talking to it. Then I wished, till I lost myself in the wish and knew nothing more, that you would come here and say—what you haven't said——"

"I love you," he said.—"But you," he went on after a moment, "—you must have——"

"I have always loved you," said Helen. "Of course. What else should I do?"

"Well, but——"

"Yes, we were little then," she said; "and when we grew big we never used to speak to each other."

"No, I couldn't," he said.

"Of course I was fond of you," she thought aloud; "but actually *in love* with you I was not—then."

"I believe that," said Barnes; "I was not one that girls fell in love with."

"I saw you the day you came home," she said, "and could think of nothing but whether it was really you. I wasn't sure—oh, well, I was inwardly, but not—outwardly! So I asked and found out that you had come home—and then I knew what it was to be in

love. I saw you again when you left for Copenhagen. That's a long time ago."

"Yes, a week," he said.

"It is a long time to wait," she said, "when one doesn't even know whether it's any use waiting."

"You might have known you had me in your pocket," he said.

While conversing thus, they wandered about the garden, with frequent halts when Barnes found it necessary to make sure in tangible fashion that he "really had his knife." But at last it occurred to him that he was bound for the parsonage.

"The poor old parson!" he exclaimed. "He's waiting at home and wondering what's happened to the prodigal son. I've kept him over two hours. Couldn't you come home with me and tell him what has delayed me on the way?"

Pastor Barnes stood outside the parsonage with his eyes on the road, which was still as long and empty as ever.

At last a couple of figures appeared at the top of the hill.

"That's Christian," said Pastor Barnes with relief; "but who can the girl be with him?"

LXV. Free

ON Sunday afternoon the Professor returned from the parsonage to find Holger Enke sitting on his door-step. He had been sitting there long enough to be lost in himself; he did not move and neither heard nor saw.

The Professor looked at his calm figure and thought, as he went up the path: "He's just as motionless as the house behind him; he might be a big stone—or an animal, since he has breath."

As Holger turned his face towards him and rose, the Professor forgot to give him any greeting, for the idea struck him: "Hang me if he mightn't be a god! The only thing he's not the least like is—a man."

The little smile that appeared on Holger's lips put the thought to shame and made the Professor start, almost agape with amazement. For he found himself the object of the little affectionate smile with which from his earliest years Holger had regarded everything that was small, delicate and weak, and in need of protection.

The Professor had had a few experiences in his chequered life, but this was a new one. For the first time—as far as he remembered—he had lost his confidence and his bearings: he was not used to being regarded as "a good little thing." He felt himself the object of an odd tutorial affection, which, without intending it, put him in his place; and that place was hardly so roomy as the one he usually disposed of. His quack's practice, of which he was a little proud, sank into insignificance, and drew himself with it. And the cause of this humiliation was the most shining result of that very quackery, the man who stood here regarding him with parental tenderness, and whose smile was that of a father, a mother and a friend. . . .

When they had had supper the Professor lighted a cigar and offered Holger one, but Holger said no, thanks, he didn't smoke.

"On principle?" asked the Professor.

"No, I haven't any—what you call principles," said Holger; "but—but I don't know why I should smoke."

The Professor leaned back comfortably in his chair and watched the smoke as it poured out of his mouth. No explanation was required why *he* should smoke.

"You came out to me the other day to ask something about the Vissingröd miller's man," said Holger, "and I told you what I could at the time. But then you asked me what I was thinking of, and I couldn't answer at once, because I was really not thinking but living in what had gone before and what came after. Which was, after all, the same thing. And now I've been thinking that you're always interested"—he smiled as if he were offering a child a fascinating toy—"in what's going on in other people. And you've been good to me in a way nobody else could have been, so if you're interested it's only fair you should hear what happened before that meeting at the crossways."

"Why, had you seen him before?" asked the Professor.

"No. But I had seen something else, and afterwards I understood that it was because of that I let him go in peace. The wiping-out of a man which had to be done—for he and I couldn't meet and go on living in the same world—that had been done already without my knowing it. That meeting at the crossways was only a confirmation of it."

"Then what had happened?" asked the Professor.

"Ah—what had happened?" repeated Holger. "What had happened that I have power to tell? Nothing. Everything. A vision. A dream. A greater reality than what we generally see."

He looked across at the Professor, as though he would try to adapt his words to his intelligence.

"Yes, it must have been a dream," he said; "let us call it a dream. But in that case the first thing I dreamt was that I was *awake*. I dreamt I was sitting up in bed awake and was just going to open my eyes and receive my sight. For it was as though I had been blind up till then, but now my eyes were to be opened. I opened them and looked into heaven.

"And there people were living in the company of those they loved; and there was no misunderstanding and no possibility of strife, and there could be no parting. And their life was this: every moment they were coming nearer to each other and understanding better how they could love one another. And my heart grew warm and I said: 'This is the land of happiness!' And I was sad, for I have never tried human happiness. But I looked

to see where *my* happiness lay, and asked: 'Where is God?' For he was not in this land of happiness. Except—if you can say so—as the gratitude in their hearts for their happiness. . . .

"Then it was as though I was still blind and my eyes were to be opened; and after that I saw the heaven where are those who worship God. A mighty grace poured down upon them, as much as they had room for in their hearts. Angels surrounded them and taught them a deeper worship, so that they might have room for yet more grace. I thought: 'This is bliss. But where is God?' For he was not in the heaven of the blissful. In it there could be no other than themselves, for they prayed to God for their *own* sakes, that they might be filled with his grace.

"And again it was as though I was blind, and my eyes were to be opened before I could see. Then I saw into the heaven where are those who search into life to find out whence it comes, what it is, and whither it goes. There sat men who knew all the things I shall never know and feel no desire to know. In front of each one was a globe, which was alive and in movement, with life coming into being and growing before their eyes, and they followed it so closely that they knew of nothing but themselves and what they saw. It was so still in this heaven that those who had power to understand must have been able to hear their thoughts. In front of each of these globes was a little golden sun—a mirror, so to speak—but of living gold, which did not reflect him who looked into it, but showed a fathomless golden depth. I saw a face glide across one of these golden suns; and he who sat before it rose up, and I knew that his wife's life upon earth had come to an end. I saw him wait, I saw her come, I saw him take her by the hand and lead her into the heaven where his heart was. I knew that that heaven was not hers, but that it was to be hers, since it was his; and I thought: 'Such is love.' But I asked again: 'Where is God?' For God was not in the heaven where they learned to understand everything—except him.

"Then again it was as though I had been blind and my eyes were opened, so that I could see. I saw the heaven where are those who worship God for his own sake. But I cannot tell what I saw, for while I was looking it was continually swelling and growing: the radiance had new rays, as though it had been dull before; immensity grew vaster, as though it had been small before; felicity became abundant, as though it had been poor. It was splendour. It was glory. Everything that on earth is radiant to our eyes has

its light from there, the morning sun its brightness, the evening sun its glory, life itself its life. Without it all eyes would be dull, gold would be yellow, but not golden.

"Yes—that is just how it is. . . ."

He ceased speaking and gazed before him. His eyes had shone as though they still saw what he was speaking of. Now their expression changed; instead of rapture came a profound calm, greater than the calm of death; it was that of life and death together, as though the irreconcilable powers had merged together into a third, which was mightier than both.

The Professor felt a cold thrill which had in it something of fear and of reverence; Holger began to speak again:

"There was a manifold variety, a superfluity of diverse forms. But there was one thing in common; all existed in a great exaltation, breathed in a deliverance which had no bounds. But the strange thing was that this eternal exaltation became like a yoke to me, although it could never tire me; and I felt the deliverance, which eternally grew greater, as a burden. I gazed into the glory, but found no others who felt it thus; and as I gazed I heard a voice—but not outside me—saying: 'What are you looking for in God's glory?' I answered—but I used no words: 'I am looking for God.' The voice said: 'This is God's glory.' I asked again: 'Where is God himself?' The voice answered: 'You who dare to question here, open your eyes and see!'

"And instantly I was shut out from the glory. It lay behind me, so to speak. Before me was something—I suppose I must call it—a room. There was no joy in it; though I could see nothing, I thought: 'Everything that is the opposite of joy is in there.' But behind this—room I saw another. There is nothing I can call it. Every name would be too big. I might call it a desert; I might say a closet; both names are too big, because they mean something. Here was nothing you could lay your hand on and give a name to and call your own. But a longing drew me towards it, and although I heard no voice and saw nothing to guide me, I knew I would go there. *For in there was God.*

"But as I was about to go through the joyless room which lay before God's poverty, I checked myself and was seized with terror. This terror poured over me like rain and penetrated me like a consuming poison, dissolving and destroying everything that was *I*. I dared not go right in, I dared not cease to be *myself*, go on living and not be myself.

"But then I saw again the room that was so small that there could be nothing in it except God, and longing drew me on, and I thought as I went: 'In ceasing to be, you come nearer to God than if you stay here and remain yourself.' I went in and died a death which was as like the death of our body as a nightmare is like quiet sleep."

His eyelids dropped, his face closed. He sat as motionless as when he was on the door-step.

Something fell on the floor with a short, dull sound. It was the Professor's cigar, which had gone out and now fell from his fingers. He did not pick it up, but gazed at Holger, who was sitting so near him, and seemed so far away that communication was not to be imagined. He found his lips moving to form an anxious question: "What then? what then?"—but when he became fully conscious of it he was unable to utter the words. It was as though the terror Holger had felt before God's poverty stood in the way of this last question. A deep calm, resembling neither life nor death, rested upon Holger's frame and diffused itself from it; the Professor felt an instinctive desire to escape; in the face of this calm the man who usually lived on stillness and silence felt something like a fear that his consciousness might go under and never come up again. He was caught in a vortex of infinity which would drag him with it if he did not do something. He would have to make Holger go on talking, hear his living voice, feel his thoughts stirring; and he asked:

"Then according to your dream, God is—nothing?"

"You may say so," said Holger.

"Then there is no God."

"Yes, there is."

"He must either be or not be."

"No."

"There is no third alternative." He turned abruptly to Holger and his tone showed slight irritation.

Holger hesitated a moment. "Shall I tell you what I think?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Very well. Then you must remember Hansine. Who was it that loved and killed?"

"It was you."

"Now think of the Vissingröd miller's man. Who was it that hated and forgave?"

"I say with admiration that it was you again."

"And who is it that's sitting here with you?"

"Since you ask me—it's you."

"But now if I tell you that I don't feel the hairs of my head as mine, but only that they're there; and don't feel that my eyes see, but only that there is a seeing; or that my ears hear, only that there is a hearing; and that I don't feel my breath as mine, only that it's drawn; or that my feet walk and my hands do their work, only that these things happen: then who am I, who did these conflicting things—who loved and killed, who hated and forgave, who neither love nor hate any more? Who am neither attracted nor repelled, who know nothing of will or aim?"

"Do you mean by that that you don't exist?"

"You may say so."

"But you're here."

"Then there must be a 'third alternative.' "

"You *remember* what you have done, therefore you, sitting here, are the one who did it."

"It wasn't *I* who did it."

"Not you?"

"Hans Olsen once said to me: 'You were not yourself when you did that to Hansine.' But I was no more 'myself' when I did good to anybody. I was always at the mercy of one of the powers and knew very little about myself. Why, it even happened that I could hate from love, that I could strike from affection. The powers of life acted as they pleased with me."

"The 'powers' of life acted—then what were *you*?"

"I was the conflict between them. In that I learned to know myself and felt what would be able to deliver me from this conflict."

"And what was that?"

"That was God."

"And now?"

"I know of nothing but the deliverance."

"But that which you call God, which drove you through conflict to deliverance, that must have been an instinct in yourself?"

"Then it would have stopped when I left off being 'myself.' —But I'm thinking about my dream, which perhaps was *true* and no dream. Perhaps there is a region of heaven or a pit of hell corresponding to every feeling, and they really exist, though we can't see them. And a feeling exists, though we can't see it. If

I had a good feeling for little children, it was not *I*, but it was *mine* and a proof that I existed, and there was peace around the little ones because I had it. Perhaps the heavens are God's feelings towards the world. Because they are there and we are aware of them, we know that he exists. But God himself cares very little about his heavens."

"What makes you think that?"

Holger looked charily at the Professor and said:

"Don't be alarmed at what I'm going to say.—I don't wish my evil deed undone. It is just as near and just as dear to me—it is just as far from me and indifferent as the sheaves I used to bind in the fields for Hansine, or as a child that was being bullied in the playground. I helped the little ones from love; from love of them I beat the big ones cruelly. I loved and killed. Where there is love of that kind, there is also hate. So long as a heaven exists, there is also a hell. I do not wish my evil deed undone. Without it I should never have become free, never reached the point where I regarded my best act as no better than it."

The Professor looked at him incredulously. "No better?"

"No. And I believe that is how God looks upon his heaven and his hell and says: 'Neither this nor that is I.' But they are both signs that he exists."

"According to that," said the Professor, "life would be a conflict between opposite powers, from which consciousness arises, and God a being who has bound himself to the world and frees himself from it—together with us men."

Holger shook his head. "What you're saying now is *thoughts* you have about him. But every thought we form about him, moves us an inch away from him. He is not to be thought but lived. We are nearer to him when we scarcely believe he exists, but *feel* him within us. Yes, in *us*—for his place is a poor one. So poor that it may be found everywhere and is every man's property. Yes, truly, God's hidden dwelling lies by the highway, so openly that nobody notices it. But of *him* nothing can be said, except that he *is*. What can be said is this: There is a God for everyone who needs him. With every mile I went along my life's road—when there was a life I called mine—I prayed to God in fear and trembling, in trust and cheerfulness. At every step he was in my thoughts, at every step different and ever greater. But all the time there was something that was always the same. That which was the same the whole way was the *truth* about him.

I no longer *think* of him, I *know* myself in him. I no longer pray, but I feel as if I was always praying. This must be a song of thanksgiving that my life is ended and that I am free; it must be——”

“It must be the little ‘closet,’” said the Professor.

Holger looked at him, bent his head, and said quietly:

“Yes, it must be the little room at last.”

He looked out into the dusk, where day and night were lost in each other.

“So there can’t be any more,” said he.

“No,” said the Professor. “There is no more.”

And to himself he added:

“‘And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.’”

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